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THE WRITINGS OF

PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

COMPRISING HIS

NOVELS, TALES, AND LETTERS TO AN UNKNOWN

WITH

An Essay on the Genius and Achievement of the Author

By GEORGE SAINTSBURY, M.A.

COMPLETE IN EIGHT VOLUMES

THE NOVELS, TALES AND LETTERS
OF
PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

EDITED BY PROF GEORGE SAINTSBURY, M.A.

COLOMBA

NEW YORK PHILADELPHIA

FRANK S. HOLBY

MCMVI

"Here is your father's shirt, Orso!"
From a drawing by Gaston Vuillier.

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Translated by
THE LADY MARY LOYD

With Illustrations by
GASTON VUILLIER

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COLOMBA

CHAPTER I

"Pè far la to vendetta,
Sta sigur', vasta anche ella."
—Vocero du Niolo.

EARLY in the month of October, 181–, Colonel Sir Thomas Nevil, a distinguished Irish officer of the English army, alighted with his daughter at the Hôtel Beauveau, Marseilles, on their return from a tour in Italy. The perpetual and universal admiration of enthusiastic travellers has produced a sort of reaction, and many tourists, in their desire to appear singular, now take the *nil admirari* of Horace for their motto. To this dissatisfied class the colonel's only daughter, Miss Lydia, belonged. "The Transfiguration" had seemed to her mediocre, and Vesuvius in eruption an effect not greatly superior to that produced by the Birmingham factory chimneys. Her great objection to Italy, on the whole, was its

lack of local colour and character. My readers must discover the sense of these expressions as best they may. A few years ago I understood them very well myself, but at the present time I can make nothing of them. At first, Miss Lydia had flattered herself she had found things on the other side of the Alps which nobody had ever before seen, about which she could converse *avec les honnêtes gens,* as M. Jourdain calls them. But soon, anticipated in every direction by her countrymen, she despaired of making any fresh discoveries, and went over to the party of the opposition. It is really very tiresome not to be able to talk about the wonders of Italy without hearing somebody say "Of course you know the Raphael in the Palazzo —— at ——? It is the finest thing in Italy!" and just the thing *you* happen to have overlooked! As it would take too long to see everything, the simplest course is to resort to deliberate and universal censure.

At the Hôtel Beauveau Miss Lydia met with a bitter disappointment. She had brought back a pretty sketch of the Pelasgic or Cyclopean Gate at Segni, which, as she believed, all other artists had completely overlooked. Now, at Marseilles, she met Lady Frances Fenwick, who showed her her album, in which appeared, between a sonnet and a dried flower, the very gate

in question, brilliantly touched in with sienna. Miss Lydia gave her drawing to her maid—and lost all admiration for Pelasgic structures.

This unhappy frame of mind was shared by Colonel Nevil, who, since the death of his wife, looked at everything through his daughter's eyes. In his estimation, Italy had committed the unpardonable sin of boring his child, and was, in consequence, the most wearisome country on the face of the earth. He had no fault to find, indeed, with the pictures and statues, but he was in a position to assert that Italian sport was utterly wretched, and that he had been obliged to tramp ten leagues over the Roman Campagna, under a burning sun, to kill a few worthless red-legged partridges.

The morning after his arrival at Marseilles he invited Captain Ellis—his former adjutant, who had just been spending six weeks in Corsica—to dine with him. The captain told Miss Lydia a story about bandits, which had the advantage of bearing no resemblance to the robber tales with which she had been so frequently regaled, on the road between Naples and Rome, and he told it well. At dessert, the two men, left alone over their claret, talked of hunting—and the colonel learned that nowhere is there more excellent sport, or game more varied and abundant, than

in Corsica. "There are plenty of wild boars," said Captain Ellis. "And you have to learn to distinguish them from the domestic pigs, which are astonishingly like them. For if you kill a pig, you find yourself in difficulties with the swine-herds. They rush out of the thickets (which they call *mâquis*) armed to the teeth, make you pay for their beasts, and laugh at you besides. Then there is the mouflon, a strange animal, which you will not find anywhere else—splendid game, but hard to get—and stags, deer, pheasants, and partridges—it would be impossible to enumerate all the kinds with which Corsica swarms. If you want shooting, colonel, go to Corsica! There, as one of my entertainers said to me, you can get a shot at every imaginable kind of game, from a thrush to a man!"

At tea, the captain once more delighted Lydia with the tale of a *vendetta transversale,** even more strange than his first story, and he thoroughly stirred her enthusiasm by his descriptions of the strange wild beauty of the country, the peculiarities of its inhabitants, and their primitive hospitality and customs. Finally, he offered her a pretty little stiletto, less remarkable for its shape and copper mounting than for its origin.

*A vendetta in which vengeance falls on a more or less distant relation of the author of the original offence.

A famous bandit had given it to Captain Ellis, and had assured him it had been buried in four human bodies. Miss Lydia thrust it through her girdle, laid it on the table beside her bed, and unsheathed it twice over before she fell asleep. Her father meanwhile was dreaming he had slain a mouflon, and that its owner insisted on his paying for it, a demand to which he gladly acceded, seeing it was a most curious creature, like a boar, with stag's horns and a pheasant's tail.

"Ellis tells me there's splendid shooting in Corsica," said the colonel, as he sat at breakfast, alone with his daughter. "If it hadn't been for the distance, I should like to spend a fortnight there."

"Well," replied Miss Lydia, "why shouldn't we go to Corsica? While you are hunting I can sketch—I should love to have that grotto Captain Ellis talked about, where Napoleon used to go and study when he was a child, in my album."

It was the first time, probably, that any wish expressed by the colonel had won his daughter's approbation. Delighted as he was by this unexpected harmony on their opinions, he was nevertheless wise enough to put forward various objections, calculated to sharpen Miss Lydia's welcome whim. In vain did he dwell on the wildness of the country, and the difficulties of travel

there for a lady. Nothing frightened her; she liked travelling on horseback of all things; she delighted in the idea of bivouacking in the open; she even threatened to go as far as Asia Minor —in short, she found an answer to everything. No Englishwoman had ever been to Corsica; therefore she must go. What a pleasure it would be, when she got back to St. James's Place, to exhibit her album! "But, my dear creature, why do you pass over that delightful drawing?" "That's only a trifle—just a sketch I made of a famous Corsican bandit who was our guide." "What! you don't mean to say you have been to Corsica?"

As there were no steamboats between France and Corsica, in those days, inquiries were made for some ship about to sail for the island Miss Lydia proposed to discover. That very day the colonel wrote to Paris, to countermand his order for the suite of apartments in which he was to have made some stay, and bargained with the skipper of a Corsican schooner, just about to set sail for Ajaccio, for two poor cabins, but the best that could be had. Provisions were sent on board; the skipper swore that one of his sailors was an excellent cook, and had not his equal for *bouille-abaisse;* he promised mademoiselle should be comfortable, and have a fair wind and a calm sea.

The colonel further stipulated, in obedience to his daughter's wishes, that no other passenger should be taken on board, and that the captain should skirt the coast of the island, so that Miss Lydia might enjoy the view of the mountains.

CHAPTER II

ON the day of their departure everything was packed and sent on board early in the morning. The schooner was to sail with the evening breeze. Meanwhile, as the colonel and his daughter were walking on the Canebière, the skipper addressed them, and craved permission to take on board one of his relations, his eldest son's godfather's second cousin, who was going back to Corsica, his native country, on important business, and could not find any ship to take him over.

"He's a charming fellow," added Captain Mattei, "a soldier, an officer in the Infantry of the Guard, and would have been a colonel already if *the other* [meaning Napoleon] had still been emperor!"

"As he is a soldier," began the colonel—he was about to add, "I shall be very glad he should come with us," when Miss Lydia exclaimed in English:

"An infantry officer!" (Her father had been in the cavalry, and she consequently looked down on every other branch of the service.)

" An uneducated man, very likely, who would be sea-sick, and spoil all the pleasure of our trip! "

The captain did not understand a word of English, but he seemed to catch what Miss Lydia was saying by the pursing up of her pretty mouth, and immediately entered upon an elaborate panegyric of his relative, which he wound up by declaring him to be a gentleman, belonging to a family of *corporals,* and that he would not be in the very least in the colonel's way, for that he, the skipper, would undertake to stow him in some corner, where they should not be aware of his presence.

The colonel and Miss Nevil thought it peculiar that there should be Corsican families in which the dignity of corporal was handed down from father to son. But, as they really believed the individual in question to be some infantry corporal, they concluded he was some poor devil whom the skipper desired to take out of pure charity. If he had been an officer, they would have been obliged to speak to him and live with him; but there was no reason why they should put themselves out for a corporal—who is a person of no consequence unless his detachment is also at hand, with bayonets fixed, ready to convey a person to a place to which he would rather not be taken.

"Is your kinsman ever sea-sick?" demanded Miss Nevil sharply.

"Never, mademoiselle, he is as steady as a rock, either on sea or land!"

"Very good then, you can take him," said she.

"You can take him!" echoed the colonel, and they passed on their way.

Toward five o'clock in the evening Captain Mattei came to escort them on board the schooner. On the jetty, near the captain's gig, they met a tall young man wearing a blue frock-coat buttoned up to his chin; his face was tanned, his eyes were black, brilliant, wide open, his whole appearance intelligent and frank. His shoulders, well thrown back, and his little twisted mustache clearly revealed the soldier—for at that period mustaches were by no means common, and the National Guard had not carried the habits and appearance of the guard-room into the bosom of every family.

When the young man saw the colonel he doffed his cap, and thanked him in excellent language, and without the slightest shyness, for the service he was rendering him.

"Delighted to be of use to you, my good fellow!" said the colonel, with a friendly nod, and he stepped into the gig.

"He's not very ceremonious, this English-

man of yours," said the young man in Italian, and in an undertone, to the captain.

The skipper laid his forefinger under his left eye, and pulled down the corners of his mouth. To a man acquainted with the language of signs, this meant that the Englishman understood Italian, and was an oddity into the bargain. The young man smiled slightly and touched his forehead, in answer to Mattei's sign, as though to indicate that every Englishman had a bee in his bonnet. Then he sat down beside them, and began to look very attentively, though not impertinently, at his pretty fellow-traveller.

"These French soldiers all have a good appearance," remarked the colonel in English to his daughter, "and so it is easy to turn them into officers." Then addressing the young man in French, he said, "Tell me, my good man, what regiment have you served in?" The young man nudged his second cousin's godson's father gently with his elbow, and suppressing an ironic smile, replied that he had served in the Infantry of the Guard, and that he had just quitted the Seventh Regiment of Light Infantry.

"Were you at Waterloo? You are very young!"

"I beg your pardon, colonel, that was my only campaign."

"It counts as two," said the colonel.

The young Corsican bit his lips.

"Papa," said Miss Lydia in English, "do ask him if the Corsicans are very fond of their Buonaparte."

Before the colonel could translate her question into French, the young man answered in fairly good English, though with a marked accent:

"You know, mademoiselle, that no man is ever a prophet in his own country. We, who are Napoleon's fellow-countrymen, are perhaps less attached to him than the French. As for myself, though my family was formerly at enmity with his, I both love and admire him."

"You speak English!" exclaimed the colonel.

"Very ill, as you may perceive!"

Miss Lydia, though somewhat shocked by the young man's easy tone, could not help laughing at the idea of a personal enmity between a corporal and an emperor. She took this as a foretaste of Corsican peculiarities, and made up her mind to note it down in her journal.

"Perhaps you were a prisoner in England?" asked the colonel.

"No, colonel, I learned English in France, when I was very young, from a prisoner of your nation."

"Would mademoiselle understand, for instance, these lines from one of our Corsican songs?"

From a drawing by Gaston Vuillier.

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Then, addressing Miss Nevil:

"Mattei tells me you have just come back from Italy. No doubt, mademoiselle, you speak the purest Tuscan — I fear you'll find it somewhat difficult to understand our dialect."

"My daughter understands every Italian dialect," said the colonel. "She has the gift of languages. She doesn't get it from me."

"Would mademoiselle understand, for instance, these lines from one of our Corsican songs in which a shepherd says to his shepherdess:

"S'entrassi 'ndru paradisu santu, santu,
E nun truvassi a tia, mi n'esciria." *

Miss Lydia did understand. She thought the quotation bold, and the look which accompanied it still bolder, and replied, with a blush, "Capisco."

"And are you going back to your own country on furlough?" inquired the colonel.

"No, colonel, they have put me on half pay, because I was at Waterloo, probably, and because I am Napoleon's fellow-countryman. I am going home, as the song says, low in hope

* "If I entered the holy land of paradise and found thee not, I would depart!"—*Serenata di Zicavo.*

and low in purse," and he looked up to the sky and sighed.

The colonel slipped his hand into his pocket, and tried to think of some civil phrase with which he might slip the gold coin he was fingering into the palm of his unfortunate enemy.

"And I too," he said good-humouredly, "have been put on half pay, but your half pay can hardly give you enough to buy tobacco! Here, corporal!" and he tried to force the gold coin into the young man's closed hand, which rested on the gunwale of the gig.

The young Corsican reddened, drew himself up, bit his lips, and seemed, for a moment, on the brink of some angry reply. Then suddenly his expression changed and he burst out laughing. The colonel, grasping his gold piece still in his hand, sat staring at him.

"Colonel," said the young man, when he had recovered his gravity, "allow me to offer you two pieces of advice—the first is never to offer money to a Corsican, for some of my fellow-countrymen would be rude enough to throw it back in your face; the second is not to give people titles they do not claim. You call me 'corporal,' and I am a lieutenant—the difference is not very great, no doubt, still——"

"Lieutenant! lieutenant!" exclaimed Sir

Thomas. "But the skipper told me you were a corporal, and that your father and all your family had been corporals before you!"

At these words the young man threw himself back and laughed louder than ever, so merrily that the skipper and his two sailors joined the chorus.

"Forgive me, colonel!" he cried at last. "The mistake is so comical, and I have only just realised it. It is quite true that my family glories in the fact that it can reckon many corporals among its ancestors—but our Corsican corporals never wore stripes upon their sleeves! Toward the year of grace 1100, certain villages revolted against the tyranny of the great mountain nobles, and chose leaders of their own, whom they called *corporals*. In our island we think a great deal of being descended from these tribunes."

"I beg your pardon, sir," exclaimed the colonel, "I beg your pardon a thousand times! As you understand the cause of my mistake, I hope you will do me the kindness of forgiving it!" and he held out his hand.

"It is the just punishment of my petty pride," said the young man, still laughing, and cordially shaking the Englishman's hand. "I am not at all offended. As my friend Mattei

has introduced me so unsuccessfully, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Orso della Rebbia; I am a lieutenant on half pay; and if, as the sight of those two fine dogs of yours leads me to believe, you are coming to Corsica to hunt, I shall be very proud to do you the honours of our mountains and our *mâquis*—if, indeed, I have not forgotten them altogether!" he added, with a sigh.

At this moment the gig came alongside the schooner; the lieutenant offered his hand to Miss Lydia, and then helped the colonel to swing himself up on deck. Once there, Sir Thomas, who was still very much ashamed of his blunder, and at a loss to know what he had better do to make a man whose ancestry dated from the year 1100 forget it, invited him to supper, without waiting for his daughter's consent, and with many fresh apologies and handshakes. Miss Lydia frowned a little, but, after all, she was not sorry to know what a corporal really was. She rather liked her guest, and was even beginning to fancy there was something aristocratic about him—only she thought him too frank and merry for a hero of romance.

"Lieutenant della Rebbia," said the colonel, bowing to him, English fashion, over a glass of Madeira, "I met a great many of your coun-

trymen in Spain—they were splendid sharpshooters."

"Yes, and a great many of them have stayed in Spain," replied the young lieutenant gravely.

"I shall never forget the behaviour of a Corsican battalion at the Battle of Vittoria," said the colonel; "I have good reason to remember it, indeed," he added, rubbing his chest. "All day long they had been skirmishing in the gardens, behind the hedges, and had killed I don't know how many of our horses and men. When the retreat was sounded, they rallied and made off at a great pace. We had hoped to take our revenge on them in the open plain, but the scoundrels—I beg your pardon, lieutenant; the brave fellows, I should have said—had formed a square, and there was no breaking it. In the middle of the square—I fancy I can see him still—rode an officer on a little black horse. He kept close beside the standard, smoking his cigar as coolly as if he had been in a *café*. Every now and then their bugles played a flourish, as if to defy us. I sent my two leading squadrons at them. Whew! instead of breaking the front of the square, my dragoons passed along the sides, wheeled, and came back in great disorder, and with several riderless horses—and all the time those cursed bugles went on playing. When the

smoke which had hung over the battalion cleared away, I saw the officer still puffing at his cigar beside his eagle. I was furious, and led a final charge myself. Their muskets, foul with continual firing, would not go off, but the men had drawn up, six deep, with their bayonets pointed at the noses of our horses; you might have taken them for a wall. I was shouting, urging on my dragoons, and spurring my horse forward, when the officer I have mentioned, at length throwing away his cigar, pointed me out to one of his men, and I heard him say something like *'Al capello bianco!'*—I wore a white plume. Then I did not hear any more, for a bullet passed through my chest. That was a splendid battalion, M. della Rebbia, that first battalion of the Eighteenth—all of them Corsicans, as I was afterward told!"

"Yes," said Orso, whose eyes had shone as he listened to the story. "They covered the retreat, and brought back their eagle. Two-thirds of those brave fellows are sleeping now on the plains of Vittoria!"

"And, perhaps, you can tell me the name of the officer in command?"

"It was my father—he was then a major in the Eighteenth, and was promoted colonel for his conduct on that terrible day."

"Your father! Upon my word, he was a brave man! I should be glad to see him again, and I am certain I should recognise him. Is he still alive?"

"No, colonel," said the young man, turning slightly pale.

"Was he at Waterloo?"

"Yes, colonel; but he had not the happiness of dying on the field of battle. He died in Corsica two years ago. How beautiful the sea is! It is ten years since I have seen the Mediterranean! Don't you think the Mediterranean much more beautiful than the ocean, mademoiselle?"

"I think it too blue, and its waves lack grandeur."

"You like wild beauty then, mademoiselle! In that case, I am sure you will be delighted with Corsica."

"My daughter," said the colonel, "delights in everything that is out of the common, and for that reason she did not care much for Italy."

"The only place in Italy that I know," said Orso, "is Pisa, where I was at school for some time. But I cannot think, without admiration, of the Campo-Santo, the Duomo, and the Leaning Tower—especially of the Campo-Santo. Do you remember Orcagna's 'Death'? I think

I could draw every line of it—it is so graven on my memory."

Miss Lydia was afraid the lieutenant was going to deliver an enthusiastic tirade.

"It is very pretty," she said, with a yawn. "Excuse me, papa, my head aches a little; I am going down to my cabin."

She kissed her father on the forehead, inclined her head majestically to Orso, and disappeared. Then the two men talked about hunting and war. They discovered that at Waterloo they had been posted opposite each other, and had no doubt exchanged many a bullet. This knowledge strengthened their good understanding. Turn about, they criticized Napoleon, Wellington, and Blücher, and then they hunted buck, boar, and mountain sheep in company. At last, when night was far advanced, and the last bottle of claret had been emptied, the colonel wrung the lieutenant's hand once more and wished him good-night, expressing his hope that an acquaintance, which had begun in such ridiculous fashion, might be continued. They parted, and each went to bed.

CHAPTER III

IT was a lovely night. The moonlight was dancing on the waves, the ship glided smoothly on before a gentle breeze. Miss Lydia was not sleepy, and nothing but the presence of an unpoetical person had prevented her from enjoying those emotions which every human being possessing a touch of poetry must experience at sea by moonlight. When she felt sure the young lieutenant must be sound asleep, like the prosaic creature he was, she got up, took her cloak, woke her maid, and went on deck. Nobody was to be seen except the sailor at the helm, who was singing a sort of dirge in the Corsican dialect, to some wild and monotonous tune. In the silence of the night this strange music had its charm. Unluckily Miss Lydia did not understand perfectly what the sailor was singing. Amid a good deal that was commonplace, a passionate line would occasionally excite her liveliest curiosity. But just at the most important moment some words of *patois* would occur, the sense of which utterly escaped her. Yet she did make out that the subject was connected with a murder. Curses against the assassin, threats of

vengeance, praise of the dead were all mingled confusedly. She remembered some of the lines. I will endeavour to translate them here.

. . . "Neither cannon nor bayonets . . .
Brought pallor to his brow. . . .
As serene on the battlefield . . . as a summer sky.
He was the falcon—the eagle's friend . . .
Honey of the sand to his friends . . .
To his enemies, a tempestuous sea. . . .
. . . Prouder than the sun . . . gentler than the moon
. . . He for whom the enemies of France . . .
never waited . . . Murderers in his own land
. . . struck him from behind . .
As Vittolo slew Sampiero Corso . . .*
Never would they have dared to look him in
the face . . . Set up on the wall
before my bed . . . my well-earned cross of honour
. . . red is its ribbon . . . redder is my
shirt! . . . For my son, my son in a far country
. . . keep my cross and my blood-stained shirt! . . .
. . . He will see two holes in it . . . For each
hole, a hole in another shirt! . . . But will that accomplish
the vengeance? . . . I must have the hand
that fired, the eye that aimed . . . the heart
that planned!" . . .

Suddenly the sailor stopped short.

"Why don't you go on, my good man?" inquired Miss Nevil.

* See Filippini, Book XI. The name of Vittolo is still execrated in Corsica. At the present day it is synonymous with the word "traitor."

The sailor, with a jerk of his head, pointed to a figure appearing through the main hatchway of the schooner: it was Orso, coming up to enjoy the moonlight. "Pray finish your song," said Miss Lydia. "It interests me greatly!"

The sailor leaned toward her, and said, in a very low tone, "I don't give the *rimbecco* to anybody!"

"The what?"

The sailor, without replying, began to whistle.

"I have caught you admiring our Mediterranean, Miss Nevil," said Orso, coming toward her. "You must allow you never see a moon like this anywhere else!"

"I was not looking at it, I was altogether occupied in studying Corsican. That sailor, who has been singing a most tragic dirge, stopped short at the most interesting point."

The sailor bent down, as if to see the compass more clearly, and tugged sharply at Miss Nevil's fur cloak. It was quite evident his lament could not be sung before Lieutenant Orso.

"What were you singing, Paolo Francè?" said Orso. "Was it a *ballata* or a *vocero?* *

* When a man is dead, and more particularly when he has been murdered, his body is laid out upon a table, and the women of his family, or, failing them, of his friends' families, or even strangers, known for their poetic talent, improvise laments in verse, in the dia-

Mademoiselle understands you, and would like to hear the end."

"I have forgotten it, Ors' Anton'," said the sailor.

And instantly he began a hymn to the Virgin, at the top of his voice.

Miss Lydia listened absent-mindedly to the hymn, and did not press the singer any further —though she was quite resolved, in her own mind, to find out the meaning of the riddle later. But her maid, who, being a Florentine, could not understand the Corsican dialect any better than her mistress, was as eager as Miss Lydia for information, and, turning to Orso, before the English lady could warn her by a nudge, she said: "Captain, what does *giving the rimbecco* mean?" *

lect of the country, before a numerous audience. These women are called *voceratrici* or, according to the Corsican pronunciation, *buceratrici*, and the dirge is called *vocero*, *buceru*, or *buceratu*, on the eastern coast, and *ballata* on the western. The word *vocero*, together with its derivatives *vocerar* and *voceratrice*, comes from the Latin word *vociferare*. Occasionally several women take turns at improvising, and often the wife or daughter of the dead man sings the funeral lament herself.

* The Italian word *rimbeccare* signifies "to send back," "to rejoin," "to throw back." In the Corsican dialect it means to address to any one a public and insulting reproach—a man gives the *rimbecco* to the son of a murdered person if he tells him his father has not been avenged. The *rimbecco* is a sort of summons to the man who has not yet wiped out the insult in blood. By the Genoese law the author of a *rimbecco* was very severely punished.

"The rimbecco!" said Orso. "Why, it's the most deadly insult that can be offered to a Corsican. It means reproaching him with not having avenged his wrong. Who mentioned the rimbecco to you?"

"Yesterday, at Marseilles," replied Miss Lydia hurriedly, "the captain of the schooner used the word."

"And whom was he talking about?" inquired Orso eagerly.

"Oh, he was telling us some old story about the time—yes, I think it was about Vannina d'Ornano."

"I suppose, mademoiselle, that Vannina's death has not inspired you with any great love for our national hero, the brave Sampiero?"

"But do you think his conduct was so very heroic?"

"The excuse for his crime lies in the savage customs of the period. And then Sampiero was waging deadly war against the Genoese. What confidence could his fellow-countrymen have felt in him if he had not punished his wife, who tried to treat with Genoa?"

"Vannina," said the sailor, "had started off without her husband's leave. Sampiero did quite right to wring her neck!"

"But," said Miss Lydia, "it was to save her

husband, it was out of love for him, that she was going to ask his pardon from the Genoese."

"To ask his pardon was to degrade him!" exclaimed Orso.

"And then to kill her himself!" said Miss Lydia. "What a monster he must have been!"

"You know she begged as a favour that she might die by his hand. What about Othello, mademoiselle; do you look on him, too, as a monster?"

"There is a difference; he was jealous. Sampiero was only vain!"

"And after all is not jealousy a kind of vanity? It is the vanity of love; will you not excuse it on account of its motive?"

Miss Lydia looked at him with an air of great dignity, and, turning to the sailor, inquired when the schooner would reach port.

"The day after to-morrow," said he, "if the wind holds."

"I wish Ajaccio were in sight already, for I am sick of this ship." She rose, took her maid's arm, and walked a few paces on the deck. Orso stood motionless beside the helm, not knowing whether he had better walk beside her, or end a conversation which seemed displeasing to her.

"Blood of the Madonna, what a handsome girl!" said the sailor. "If every flea in my bed

were like her, I shouldn't complain of their biting me!"

Miss Lydia may possibly have overheard this artless praise of her beauty and been startled by it; for she went below almost immediately. Shortly after Orso also retired. As soon as he had left the deck the maid reappeared, and, having cross-questioned the sailor, carried back the following information to her mistress. The *ballata* which had been broken off on Orso's appearance had been composed on the occasion of the death of his father, Colonel della Rebbia, who had been murdered two years previously. The sailor had no doubt at all that Orso was coming back to Corsica *per fare la vendetta*, such was his expression, and he affirmed that before long there would be *fresh meat* to be seen in the village of Pietranera. This national expression, being interpreted, meant that Signor Orso proposed to murder two or three individuals suspected of having assassinated his father—individuals who had, indeed, been prosecuted on that account, but had come out of the trial as white as snow, for they were hand and glove with the judges, lawyers, prefect, and gendarmes.

"There's no justice in Corsica," added the sailor, "and I put much more faith in a good gun than in a judge of the Royal Court. If a

man has an enemy he must choose one of the three S's." *

These interesting pieces of information wrought a notable change in Miss Lydia's manner and feeling with regard to Lieutenant della Rebbia. From that moment he became a person of importance in the romantic Englishwoman's eyes.

His careless air, his frank and good humour, which had at first impressed her so unfavourably, now seemed to her an additional merit, as being proofs of the deep dissimulation of a strong nature, which will not allow any inner feeling to appear upon the surface. Orso seemed to her a sort of Fieschi, who hid mighty designs under an appearance of frivolity, and, though it is less noble to kill a few rascals than to free one's country, still a fine deed of vengeance is a fine thing, and besides, women are rather glad to find their hero is not a politician. Then Miss Nevil remarked for the first time that the young lieutenant had large eyes, white teeth, an elegant figure, that he was well educated, and possessed the habits of good society. During the following day she talked to him frequently, and found his conversation interesting. He was

* A national expression meaning *schioppetto, stiletto, strada*—that is, *gun, dagger,* or *flight.*

asked many questions about his own country, and described it well. Corsica, which he had left when young, to go first to college, and then to the École militaire, had remained in his imagination surrounded with poetic associations. When he talked of its mountains, its forests, and the quaint customs of its inhabitants he grew eager and animated. As may be imagined, the word *vengeance* occurred more than once in the stories he told—for it is impossible to speak of the Corsicans without either attacking or justifying their proverbial passion. Orso somewhat surprised Miss Nevil by his general condemnation of the undying hatreds nursed by his fellow-countrymen. As regarded the peasants, however, he endeavoured to excuse them, and claimed that the *vendetta* is the poor man's duel. "So true is this," he said, "that no assassination takes place till a formal challenge has been delivered. 'Be on your guard yourself, I am on mine!' are the sacramental words exchanged, from time immemorial, between two enemies, before they begin to lie in wait for each other. There are more assassinations among us," he added, "than anywhere else. But you will never discover an ignoble cause for any of these crimes. We have many murderers, it is true, but not a single thief."

When he spoke about vengeance and murder Miss Lydia looked at him closely, but she could not detect the slightest trace of emotion on his features. As she had made up her mind, however, that he possessed sufficient strength of mind to be able to hide his thoughts from every eye (her own, of course, excepted), she continued in her belief that Colonel della Rebbia's shade would not have to wait long for the atonement it claimed.

The schooner was already within sight of Corsica. The captain pointed out the principal features of the coast, and, though all of these were absolutely unknown to Miss Lydia, she found a certain pleasure in hearing their names; nothing is more tiresome than an anonymous landscape. From time to time the colonel's telescope revealed to her the form of some islander clad in brown cloth, armed with a long gun, bestriding a small horse, and galloping down steep slopes. In each of these Miss Lydia believed she beheld either a brigand or a son going forth to avenge his father's death. But Orso always declared it was some peaceful denizen of a neighbouring village travelling on business, and that he carried a gun less from necessity than because it was the fashion, just as no dandy ever takes a walk without an elegant cane. Though a gun

is a less noble and poetic weapon than a stiletto, Miss Lydia thought it much more stylish for a man than any cane, and she remembered that all Lord Byron's heroes died by a bullet, and not by the classic poniard.

After three days' sailing, the ship reached Les Sanguinaires (The Bloody Islands), and the magnificent panorama of the Gulf of Ajaccio was unrolled before our travellers' eyes. It is compared, with justice, to the Bay of Naples, and just as the schooner was entering the harbour a burning *mâquis,* which covered the Punta di Girato, brought back memories of Vesuvius and heightened the resemblance. To make it quite complete, Naples should be seen after one of Attila's armies had devastated its suburbs—for round Ajaccio everything looks dead and deserted. Instead of the handsome buildings observable on every side from Castellamare to Cape Misena, nothing is to be seen in the neighbourhood of the Gulf of Ajaccio but gloomy *mâquis* with bare mountains rising behind them. Not a villa, not a dwelling of any kind—only here and there, on the heights about the town, a few isolated white structures stand out against a background of green. These are mortuary chapels or family tombs. Everything in this landscape is gravely and sadly beautiful.

The appearance of the town, at that period especially, deepened the impression caused by the loneliness of its surroundings. There was no stir in the streets, where only a few listless idlers —always the same—were to be seen; no women at all, except an odd peasant come in to sell her produce; no loud talk, laughter, and singing, as in the Italian towns. Sometimes, under the shade of a tree on the public promenade, a dozen armed peasants will play at cards or watch each other play; they never shout or wrangle; if they get hot over the game, pistol shots ring out, and this always before the utterance of any threat. The Corsican is grave and silent by nature. In the evening, a few persons come out to enjoy the cool air, but the promenaders on the Corso are nearly all of them foreigners; the islanders stay in front of their own doors; each one seems on the watch, like a falcon over its nest.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Miss Lydia had visited the house in which Napoleon was born, and had procured, by means more or less moral, a fragment of the wall-paper belonging to it, she, within two days of her landing in Corsica, began to feel that profound melancholy which must overcome every foreigner in a country whose unsociable inhabitants appear to condemn him or her to a condition of utter isolation. She was already regretting her headstrong caprice; but to go back at once would have been to risk her reputation as an intrepid traveller, so she made up her mind to be patient, and kill time as best she could. With this noble resolution, she brought out her crayons and colours, sketched views of the gulf, and did the portrait of a sunburnt peasant, who sold melons, like any market-gardener on the Continent, but who wore a long white beard, and looked the fiercest rascal that had ever been seen. As all that was not enough to amuse her, she determined to turn the head of the descendant of the corporals, and this was no difficult matter, since, far from being in a hurry

to get back to his village, Orso seemed very happy at Ajaccio, although he knew nobody there. Furthermore, Miss Lydia had a lofty purpose in her mind; it was nothing less than to civilize this mountain bear, and induce him to relinquish the sinister design which had recalled him to his island. Since she had taken the trouble to study the young man, she had told herself it would be a pity to let him rush upon his ruin, and that it would be a glorious thing to convert a Corsican.

Our travellers spent the day in the following manner: Every morning the colonel and Orso went out shooting. Miss Lydia sketched or wrote letters to her friends, chiefly for the sake of dating them from Ajaccio. Toward six o'clock the gentlemen came in, laden with game. Then followed dinner. Miss Lydia sang, the colonel went to sleep, and the young people sat talking till very late.

Some formality or other, connected with his passports, had made it necessary for Colonel Nevil to call on the prefect. This gentleman, who, like most of his colleagues, found his life very dull, had been delighted to hear of the arrival of an Englishman who was rich, a man of the world, and the father of a pretty daughter. He had, therefore, given him the most friendly

reception, and overwhelmed him with offers of service; further, within a very few days, he came to return his visit. The colonel, who had just dined, was comfortably stretched out upon his sofa, and very nearly asleep. His daughter was singing at a broken-down piano; Orso was turning over the leaves of her music, and gazing at the fair singer's shoulders and golden hair. The prefect was announced, the piano stopped, the colonel got up, rubbed his eyes, and introduced the prefect to his daughter.

"I do not introduce M. della Rebbia to you," said he, "for no doubt you know him already."

"Is this gentleman Colonel della Rebbia's son?" said the prefect, looking a trifle embarrassed.

"Yes, monsieur," replied Orso.

"I had the honour of knowing your father."

The ordinary commonplaces of conversation were soon exhausted. The colonel, in spite of himself, yawned pretty frequently. Orso, as a liberal, did not care to converse with a satellite of the Government. The burden of the conversation fell on Miss Lydia. The prefect, on his side, did not let it drop, and it was clear that he found the greatest pleasure in talking of Paris, and of the great world, to a woman who

was acquainted with all the foremost people in European society. As he talked, he now and then glanced at Orso, with an expression of singular curiosity.

"Was it on the Continent that you made M. della Rebbia's acquaintance?" he inquired.

Somewhat embarrassed, Miss Lydia replied that she had made his acquaintance on the ship which had carried them to Corsica.

"He is a very gentlemanly young fellow," said the prefect, in an undertone; "and has he told you," he added, dropping his voice still lower, "why he has returned to Corsica?"

Miss Lydia put on her most majestic air and answered:

"I have not asked him," she said. "You may do so."

The prefect kept silence, but, an instant later, hearing Orso speak a few words of English to the colonel, he said:

"You seem to have travelled a great deal, monsieur. You must have forgotten Corsica and Corsican habits."

"It is quite true that I was very young when I went away."

"You still belong to the army?"

"I am on half pay, monsieur."

"You have been too long in the French army

not to have become a thorough Frenchman, I have no doubt?"

The last words of the sentence were spoken with marked emphasis.

The Corsicans are not particularly flattered at being reminded that they belong to the "Great Nation." They claim to be a people apart, and so well do they justify their claim that it may very well be granted them.

Somewhat nettled, Orso replied: "Do you think, M. le Préfet, that a Corsican must necessarily serve in the French army to become an honourable man?"

"No, indeed," said the prefect, "that is not my idea at all; I am only speaking of certain *customs* belonging to this country, some of which are not such as a Government official would like to see."

He emphasized the word *customs,* and put on as grave an expression as his features could assume. Soon after he got up and took his leave, bearing with him Miss Lydia's promise that she would go and call on his wife at the prefecture.

When he had departed: "I had to come to Corsica," said Miss Lydia, "to find out what a prefect is like. This one strikes me as rather amiable."

"For my part," said Orso, "I can't say as

much. He strikes me as a very queer individual, with his airs of emphasis and mystery."

The colonel was extremely drowsy. Miss Lydia cast a glance in his direction, and, lowering her voice:

"And I," she said, "do not think him so mysterious as you pretend; for I believe I understood him!"

"Then you are clear-sighted indeed, Miss Nevil. If you have seen any wit in what he has just said you must certainly have put it there yourself."

"It is the Marquis de Mascarille, I think, who says that, M. della Rebbia. But would you like me to give you a proof of my clear-sightedness? I am something of a witch, and I can read the thoughts of people I have seen only twice."

"Good heavens! you alarm me. If you really can read my thoughts I don't know whether I should be glad or sorry."

"M. della Rebbia," went on Miss Lydia, with a blush, "we have only known each other for a few days. But at sea, and in savage countries (you will excuse me, I hope)—in savage countries friendships grow more quickly than they do in society . . . so you must not be astonished if I speak to you, as a friend, upon private

matters, with which, perhaps, a stranger ought not to interfere."

"Ah! do not say that word, Miss Nevil. I like the other far better."

"Well, then, monsieur, I must tell you that without having tried to find out your secrets, I have learned some of them, and they grieve me. I have heard, monsieur, of the misfortune which has overtaken your family. A great deal has been said to me about the vindictive nature of your fellow-countrymen, and the fashion in which they take their vengeance. Was it not to that the prefect was alluding?"

"Miss Lydia! Can you believe it!" and Orso turned deadly pale.

"No, M. della Rebbia," she said, interrupting him, "I know you to be a most honourable gentleman. You have told me yourself that it was only the common people in your country who still practised the *vendetta*—which you are pleased to describe as a kind of duel."

"Do you, then, believe me capable of ever becoming a murderer?"

"Since I have mentioned the subject at all, Monsieur Orso, you must clearly see that I do not suspect you, and if I have spoken to you at all," she added, dropping her eyes, "it is because I have realized that, surrounded, it may be,

by barbarous prejudices on your return home, you will be glad to know that there is somebody who esteems you for having the courage to resist them. Come!" said she, rising to her feet, "don't let us talk again of such horrid things; they make my head ache, and besides it's very late. You are not angry with me, are you? Let us say good-night in the English fashion," and she held out her hand.

Orso pressed it, looking grave and deeply moved.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "do you know that there are moments when the instincts of my country wake up within me. Sometimes, when I think of my poor father, horrible thoughts assail me. Thanks to you, I am rid of them forever. Thank you! thank you!"

He would have continued, but Miss Lydia dropped a teaspoon, and the noise woke up the colonel.

"Della Rebbia, we'll start at five o'clock tomorrow morning. Be punctual!"

"Yes, colonel."

CHAPTER V

THE next day, a short time before the sportsmen came back, Miss Nevil, returning with her maid from a walk along the seashore, was just about to enter the inn, when she noticed a young woman, dressed in black, riding into the town on a small but strong horse. She was followed by a sort of peasant, also on horseback, who wore a brown cloth jacket out at the elbows. A gourd was slung over his shoulder and a pistol was hanging at his belt, his hand grasped a gun, the butt of which rested in a leathern pocket fastened to his saddle-bow—in short, he wore the complete costume of a brigand in a melodrama, or of the middle-class Corsican on his travels. Miss Nevil's attention was first attracted by the woman's remarkable beauty. She seemed about twenty years of age; she was tall and pale, with dark blue eyes, red lips, and teeth like enamel. In her expression pride, anxiety, and sadness were all legible. On her head she wore a black silk veil called a *mezzaro,* which the Genoese introduced into Corsica, and which is so becoming to women. Long braids

of chestnut hair formed a sort of turban round her head. Her dress was neat, but simple in the extreme.

Miss Nevil had plenty of time to observe her, for the lady in the *mezzaro* had halted in the street, and was questioning somebody on a subject which, to judge from the expression of her eyes, must have interested her exceedingly. Then, as soon as she received an answer, she touched her mount with her riding-switch, and, breaking into a quick trot, never halted till she reached the door of the hotel in which Sir Thomas Nevil and Orso were staying. There, after exchanging a few words with the host, the girl sprang nimbly from her saddle and seated herself on a stone bench beside the entrance door, while her groom led the horses away to the stable. Miss Lydia, in her Paris gown, passed close beside the stranger, who did not raise her eyes. A quarter of an hour later she opened her window, and saw the lady in the *mezzaro* still sitting in the same place and in the same attitude. Not long afterward the colonel and Orso returned from hunting. Then the landlord said a few words to the young lady in mourning, and pointed to della Rebbia with his finger. She coloured deeply, rose eagerly, went a few paces forward, and then stopped short, apparently

much confused. Orso was quite close to her, and was looking at her curiously.

"Are you Orso Antonio della Rebbia?" said she in a tremulous voice. "I am Colomba."

"Colomba!" cried Orso.

And taking her in his arms he kissed her tenderly, somewhat to the surprise of the colonel and his daughter—for in England people do not kiss each other in the street.

"Brother," said Colomba, "you must forgive me for having come without your permission. But I heard from our friends that you had arrived, and it is such a great consolation to me to see you."

Again Orso kissed her. Then, turning to the colonel:

"This is my sister," said he, "whom I never should have recognised if she had not told me her name—Colomba—Colonel Sir Thomas Nevil—colonel, you will kindly excuse me, but I can not have the honour of dining with you to-day. My sister——"

"But, my dear fellow, where the devil do you expect to dine? You know very well there is only one dinner in this infernal tavern, and we have bespoken it. It will afford my daughter great pleasure if this young lady will join us."

Colomba looked at her brother, who did not

need much pressing, and they all passed together into the largest room in the inn, which the colonel used as his sitting and dining room. Mademoiselle della Rebbia, on being introduced to Miss Nevil, made her a deep courtesy, but she did not utter a single word. It was easy to see that she was very much frightened at finding herself, perhaps for the first time in her life, in the company of strangers belonging to the great world. Yet there was nothing provincial in her manners. The novelty of her position excused her awkwardness. Miss Nevil took a liking to her at once, and, as there was no room disengaged in the hotel, the whole of which was occupied by the colonel and his attendants, she offered, either out of condescension or curiosity, to have a bed prepared in her own room for Mademoiselle della Rebbia.

Colomba stammered a few words of thanks, and hastened after Miss Nevil's maid, to make such changes in her toilet as were rendered necessary by a journey on horseback in the dust and heat.

When she re-entered the sitting-room, she paused in front of the colonel's guns, which the hunters had left in a corner.

"What fine weapons," said she. "Are they yours, brother?"

"No, they are the colonel's English guns—and they are as good as they are handsome."

"How much I wish you had one like them!" said Colomba.

"One of those three certainly does belong to della Rebbia," exclaimed the colonel. "He really shoots almost too well! To-day he fired fourteen shots, and brought down fourteen head of game."

A friendly dispute at once ensued, in which Orso was vanquished, to his sister's great satisfaction, as it was easy to perceive from the childish expression of delight which illumined her face, so serious a moment before.

"Choose, my dear fellow," said the colonel; but Orso refused.

"Very well, then. Your sister shall choose for you."

Colomba did not wait for a second invitation. She took up the plainest of the guns, but it was a first-rate Manton of large calibre.

"This one," she said, "must carry a ball a long distance."

Her brother was growing quite confused in his expressions of gratitude, when dinner appeared, very opportunely, to help him out of his embarrassment.

Miss Lydia was delighted to notice that Co-

lomba, who had shown considerable reluctance to sit down with them, and had yielded only at a glance from her brother, crossed herself, like a good Catholic, before she began to eat.

"Good!" said she to herself, "that is primitive!" and she anticipated acquiring many interesting facts by observing this youthful representative of ancient Corsican manners. As for Orso, he was evidently a trifle uneasy, fearing, doubtless, that his sister might say or do something which savoured too much of her native village. But Colomba watched him constantly, and regulated all her own movements by his. Sometimes she looked at him fixedly, with a strange expression of sadness, and then, if Orso's eyes met hers, he was the first to turn them away, as though he would evade some question which his sister was mentally addressing to him, the sense of which he understood only too well. Everybody talked French, for the colonel could only express himself very badly in Italian. Colomba understood French, and even pronounced the few words she was obliged to exchange with her entertainers tolerably well.

After dinner, the colonel, who had noticed the sort of constraint which existed between the brother and sister, inquired of Orso, with his customary frankness, whether he did not wish to be

alone with Mademoiselle Colomba, offering, in that case, to go into the next room with his daughter. But Orso hastened to thank him, and to assure him they would have plenty of time to talk at Pietranera—this was the name of the village where he was to take up his abode.

The colonel then resumed his customary position on the sofa, and Miss Nevil, after attempting several subjects of conversation, gave up all hope of inducing the fair Colomba to talk, and begged Orso to read her a canto out of Dante, her favourite poet. Orso chose the canto of the Inferno, containing the episode of Francesca da Rimini, and began to read, as impressively as he was able, the glorious tiercets which so admirably express the risk run by two young persons who venture to read a love-story together. As he read on Colomba drew nearer to the table, and raised her head, which she had kept lowered. Her wide-open eyes shone with extraordinary fire; she grew red and pale by turns, and stirred convulsively in her chair. How admirable is the Italian organization, which can understand poetry without needing a pedant to explain its beauties!

When the canto was finished:

"How beautiful that is!" she exclaimed. "Who wrote it, brother?"

Orso was a little disconcerted, and Miss Lydia answered with a smile that it was written by a Florentine poet, who had been dead for centuries.

"You shall read Dante," said Orso, "when we are at Pietranera."

"Good heavens, how beautiful it is!" said Colomba again, and she repeated three or four tiercets which she had remembered, speaking at first in an undertone; then, growing excited, she declaimed them aloud, with far more expression than her brother had put into his reading.

Miss Lydia was very much astonished.

"You seem very fond of poetry," she said. "How I envy you the delight you will find in reading Dante for the first time!"

"You see, Miss Nevil," said Orso, "what a power Dante's lines must have, when they so move a wild young savage who knows nothing but her *Pater*. But I am mistaken! I recollect now that Colomba belongs to the guild. Even when she was quite a little child she used to try her hand at verse-making, and my father used to write me word that she was the best *voceratrice* in Pietranera, and for two leagues round about."

Colomba cast an imploring glance at her brother. Miss Nevil had heard of the Corsican *improvisatrice,* and was dying to hear one. She

begged Colomba, then, to give her a specimen of her powers. Very much vexed now at having made any mention of his sister's poetic gifts, Orso interposed. In vain did he protest that nothing was so insipid as a Corsican *ballata,* and that to recite Corsican verses after those of Dante was like betraying his country. All he did was to stimulate Miss Nevil's curiosity, and at last he was obliged to say to his sister:

"Well! well! improvise something—but let it be short!"

Colomba heaved a sigh, looked fixedly for a moment, first at the table-cloth, and then at the rafters of the ceiling; at last, covering her eyes with her hand like those birds that gather courage, and fancy they are not seen when they no longer see themselves, she sang, or rather declaimed, in an unsteady voice, the following *serenata:*

"THE MAIDEN AND THE TURTLE-DOVE

"In the valley, far away among the mountains, the sun only shines for an hour every day. In the valley there stands a gloomy house, and grass grows on its threshold. Doors and windows are always shut. No smoke rises from the roof. But at noon, when the sunshine falls, a

window opens, and the orphan girl sits spinning at her wheel. She spins, and as she works, she sings—a song of sadness. But no other song comes to answer hers! One day—a day in spring-time—a turtle-dove settled on a tree hard by, and heard the maiden's song. 'Maiden,' it said, 'thou art not the only mourner! A cruel hawk has snatched my mate from me!' 'Turtle-dove, show me that cruel hawk; were it to soar higher than the clouds I would soon bring it down to earth! But who will restore to me, unhappy that I am, my brother, now in a far country?' 'Maiden, tell me where thy brother is, and my wings shall bear me to him.'"

"A well-bred turtle-dove, indeed!" exclaimed Orso, and the emotion with which he kissed his sister contrasted strongly with the jesting tone in which he spoke.

"Your song is delightful," said Miss Lydia. "You must write it in my album; I'll translate it into English, and have it set to music."

The worthy colonel, who had not understood a single word, added his compliments to his daughter's and added: "Is this dove you speak of the bird we eat broiled at dinner to-day?"

Miss Nevil fetched her album, and was not a little surprised to see the *improvisatrice* write

down her song, with so much care in the matter of economizing space.

The lines, instead of being separate, were all run together, as far as the breadth of the paper would permit, so that they did not agree with the accepted definition of poetic composition—"short lines of unequal length, with a margin on each side of them." Mademoiselle Colomba's somewhat fanciful spelling might also have excited comment. More than once Miss Nevil was seen to smile, and Orso's fraternal vanity suffered tortures.

Bedtime came, and the two young girls retired to their room. There, while Miss Lydia unclasped her necklace, ear-rings, and bracelets, she watched her companion draw something out of her gown—something as long as a stay-busk, but very different in shape. Carefully, almost stealthily, Colomba slipped this object under her *mezzaro,* which she had laid on the table. Then she knelt down, and said her prayers devoutly. Two minutes afterward she was in her bed. Miss Lydia, naturally very inquisitive, and as slow as every Englishwoman is about undressing herself, moved over to the table, pretended she was looking for a pin, lifted up the *mezzaro,* and saw a long stiletto—curiously mounted in silver and mother-of-pearl. The workmanship

was remarkably fine. It was an ancient weapon, and just the sort of one an amateur would have prized very highly.

"Is it the custom here," inquired Miss Nevil, with a smile, "for young ladies to wear such little instruments as these in their bodices?"

"It is," answered Colomba, with a sigh. "There are so many wicked people about!"

"And would you really have the courage to strike with it, like this?" And Miss Nevil, dagger in hand, made a gesture of stabbing from above, as actors do on the stage.

"Yes," said Colomba, in her soft, musical voice, "if I had to do it to protect myself or my friends. But you must not hold it like that, you might wound yourself if the person you were going to stab were to draw back." Then, sitting up in bed, "See," she added, "you must strike like this—upward! If you do so, the thrust is sure to kill, they say. Happy are they who never need such weapons."

She sighed, dropped her head back on the pillow, and closed her eyes. A more noble, beautiful, virginal head it would be impossible to imagine. Phidias would have asked no other model for Minerva.

CHAPTER VI

IT is in obedience to the precept of Horace that I have begun by plunging *in medias res.* Now that every one is asleep—the beautiful Colomba, the colonel, and his daughter —I will seize the opportunity to acquaint my reader with certain details of which he must not be ignorant, if he desires to follow the further course of this veracious history. He is already aware that Colonel della Rebbia, Orso's father, had been assassinated. Now, in Corsica, people are not murdered, as they are in France, by the first escaped convict who can devise no better means of relieving a man of his silver-plate. In Corsica a man is murdered by his enemies—but the reason he has enemies is often very difficult to discover. Many families hate each other because it has been an old-standing habit of theirs to hate each other; but the tradition of the original cause of their hatred may have completely disappeared.

The family to which Colonel della Rebbia belonged hated several other families, but that of the Barricini particularly. Some people as-

serted that in the sixteenth century a della Rebbia had seduced a lady of the Barricini family, and had afterward been poniarded by a relative of the outraged damsel. Others, indeed, told the story in a different fashion, declaring that it was a della Rebbia who had been seduced, and a Barricini who had been poniarded. However that may be, there was, to use the time-honoured expression, "blood between the two houses." Nevertheless, and contrary to custom, this murder had not resulted in others; for the della Rebbia and the Barricini had both been equally persecuted by the Genoese Government, and as the young men had all left the country, the two families were deprived, during several generations, of their more energetic representatives. At the close of the last century, one of the della Rebbias, an officer in the Neapolitan service, quarrelled, in a gambling hell, with some soldiers, who called him a Corsican goatherd, and other insulting names. He drew his sword, but being only one against three, he would have fared very ill if a stranger, who was playing in the same room, had not exclaimed, "I, too, am a Corsican," and come to his rescue. This stranger was one of the Barricini, who, for that matter, was not acquainted with his countryman. After mutual explanations, they interchanged courtesies and

vowed eternal friendship. For on the Continent, quite contrary to their practice in their own island, Corsicans quickly become friends. This fact was clearly exemplified on the present occasion. As long as della Rebbia and Barricini remained in Italy they were close friends. Once they were back in Corsica, they saw each other but very seldom, although they both lived in the same village; and when they died, it was reported that they had not spoken to each other for five or six years. Their sons lived in the same fashion—"on ceremony," as they say in the island; one of them, Ghilfuccio, Orso's father, was a soldier; the other, Giudice Barricini, was a lawyer. Having both become heads of families, and being separated by their professions, they scarcely ever had an opportunity of seeing or hearing of each other.

One day, however, about the year 1809, Giudice read in a newspaper at Bastia that Captain Ghilfuccio had just been decorated, and remarked, before witnesses, that he was not at all surprised, considering that the family enjoyed the protection of General ——. This remark was reported at Vienna to Ghilfuccio, who told one of his countrymen that, when he got back to Corsica, he would find Giudice a very rich man, because he made more money out of the suits he

lost than out of those he won. It was never known whether he meant this as an insinuation that the lawyer cheated his clients, or as a mere allusion to the commonplace truth that a bad cause often brings a lawyer more profit than a good one. However that may have been, the lawyer Barricini heard of the epigram, and never forgot it. In 1812 he applied for the post of mayor of his commune, and had every hope of being appointed, when General —— wrote to the prefect, to recommend one of Ghilfuccio's wife's relations. The prefect lost no time in carrying out the general's wish, and Barricini felt no doubt that he owed his failure to the intrigues of Ghilfuccio. In 1814, after the emperor's fall, the general's protégé was denounced as a Bonapartist, and his place was taken by Barricini. He, in his turn, was dismissed during the Hundred Days, but when the storm had blown over, he again took possession, with great pomp, of the mayoral seal and the municipal registers.

From this moment his star shone brighter than ever. Colonel della Rebbia, now living on half pay at Pietranera, had to defend himself against covert and repeated attacks due to the pettifogging malignity of his enemy. At one time he was summoned to pay for the damage his horse had done to the mayor's fences; at another,

the latter, under pretence of repairing the floor of the church, ordered the removal of a broken flagstone bearing the della Rebbia arms, which covered the grave of some member of the family. If the village goats ate the colonel's young plants, the mayor always protected their owners. The grocer who kept the post-office at Pietranera, and the old maimed soldier who had been the village policeman—both of them attached to the della Rebbia family—were turned adrift, and their places filled by Barricini's creatures.

The colonel's wife died, and her last wish was that she might be buried in the middle of the little wood in which she had been fond of walking. Forthwith the mayor declared she should be buried in the village cemetery, because he had no authority to permit burial in any other spot. The colonel, in a fury, declared that until the permit came, his wife would be interred in the spot she had chosen. He had her grave dug there. The mayor, on his side, had another grave dug in the cemetery, and sent for the police, that the law, so he declared, might be duly enforced. On the day of the funeral, the two parties came face to face, and, for a moment, there was reason to fear a struggle might ensue for the possession of Signora della Rebbia's corpse. Some forty well-armed peasants, mus-

tered by the dead woman's relatives, forced the priest, when he issued from the church, to take the road to the wood. On the other hand, the mayor, at the head of his two sons, his dependents, and the gendarmes, advanced to oppose their march. When he appeared, and called on the procession to turn back, he was greeted with howls and threats. The advantage of numbers was with his opponents, and they seemed thoroughly determined. At sight of him several guns were loaded, and one shepherd is even said to have levelled his musket at him, but the colonel knocked up the barrel, and said, "Let no man fire without my orders!" The mayor, who, like Panurge, had "a natural fear of blows," refused to give battle, and retired, with his escort. Then the funeral procession started, carefully choosing the longest way, so as to pass in front of the mayor's house. As it was filing by, an idiot, who had joined its ranks, took it into his head to shout, "Vive l'Empereur!" Two or three voices answered him, and the Rebbianites, growing hotter, proposed killing one of the mayor's oxen, which chanced to bar their way. Fortunately the colonel stopped this act of violence.

It is hardly necessary to mention that an official statement was at once drawn up, or that the mayor sent the prefect a report, in his sublimest

style, describing the manner in which all laws, human and divine, had been trodden under foot —how the majesty of himself, the mayor, and of the priest had been flouted and insulted, and how Colonel della Rebbia had put himself at the head of a Bonapartist plot, to change the order of succession to the throne, and to excite peaceful citizens to take arms against one another—crimes provided against by Articles 86 and 91 of the Penal Code.

The exaggerated tone of this complaint diminished its effect. The colonel wrote to the prefect and to the public prosecutor. One of his wife's kinsmen was related to one of the deputies of the island, another was cousin to the president of the Royal Court. Thanks to this interest, the plot faded out of sight, Signora della Rebbia was left quiet in the wood, and the idiot alone was sentenced to a fortnight's imprisonment.

Lawyer Barricini, dissatisfied with the result of this affair, turned his batteries in a different direction. He dug out some old claim, whereby he undertook to contest the colonel's ownership of a certain water-course which turned a mill-wheel. A lawsuit began and dragged slowly along. At the end of twelve months, the court was about to give its decision, and according to

all appearances in favour of the colonel, when Barricini placed in the hands of the public prosecutor a letter, signed by a certain Agostini, a well-known bandit, threatening him, the mayor, with fire and sword if he did not relinquish his pretensions. It is well known that in Corsica the protection of these brigands is much sought after, and that, to oblige their friends, they frequently intervene in private quarrels. The mayor was deriving considerable advantage from this letter, when the business was further complicated by a fresh incident. Agostini, the bandit, wrote to the public prosecutor, to complain that his handwriting had been counterfeited, and his character aspersed, by some one who desired to represent him as a man who made a traffic of his influence. "If I can discover the forger," he said at the end of his letter, "I will make a striking example of him."

It was quite clear that Agostini did not write the threatening letter to the mayor. The della Rebbia accused the Barricini of it and *vice versa*. Both parties broke into open threats, and the authorities did not know where to find the culprit.

In the midst of all this Colonel Ghilfuccio was murdered. Here are the facts, as they were elicited at the official inquiry. On the 2d of

August, 18—, toward nightfall, a woman named Maddalena Pietri, who was carrying corn to Pietranera, heard two shots fired, very close together, the reports, as it seemed to her, coming from the deep lane leading to the village, about a hundred and fifty paces from the spot on which she stood. Almost immediately afterward she saw a man running, crouching along a foot-path among the vines, and making for the village. The man stopped for a minute, and turned round, but the distance prevented the woman Pietri from seeing his features, and besides, he had a vine-leaf in his mouth, which hid almost the whole of his face. He made a signal with his head to some comrade, whom the witness could not see, and then disappeared among the vines.

The woman Pietri dropped her burden, ran up the path, and found Colonel della Rebbia, bathed in his own blood from two bullet wounds, but still breathing. Close beside him lay his gun, loaded and cocked, as if he had been defending himself against a person who had attacked him in front, just when another had struck him from behind. Although the rattle was in his throat, he struggled against the grip of death, but he could not utter a word—this the doctors explained by the nature of the wounds, which had cut through his lungs: the blood was choking

him, it flowed slowly, like red froth. In vain did the woman lift him up, and ask him several questions. She saw plainly enough that he desired to speak, but he could not make himself understood. Noticing that he was trying to get his hand to his pocket, she quickly drew out of it a little note-book, which she opened and gave to him.

The wounded man took the pencil out of the note-book and tried to write. In fact, the witness saw him form several letters, but with great difficulty. As she could not read, however, she was unable to understand their meaning. Exhausted by the effort, the colonel left the note-book in the woman's hand, which he squeezed tightly, looking at her strangely, as if he wanted to say (these are the witness's own words): "It is important—it is my murderer's name!"

Maddalena Pietra was going up to the village, when she met Barricini, the mayor, with his son Vincentello. It was then almost dark. She told them what she had seen. The mayor took the note-book, hurried up to his house, put on his sash, and fetched his secretary and the gendarmes. Left alone with young Vincentello, Maddalena Pietri suggested that he should go to the colonel's assistance, in case he was still alive, but Vincentello replied that if he were to

go near a man who had been the bitter enemy of his family, he would certainly be accused of having killed him. A very short time afterward the mayor arrived, found the colonel dead, had the corpse carried away, and drew up his report.

In spite of the agitation so natural on such an occasion, Monsieur Barricini had hastened to place the colonel's note-book under seal, and to make all the inquiries in his power, but none of them resulted in any discovery of importance.

When the examining magistrate arrived the note-book was opened, and on a blood-stained page were seen letters written in a trembling hand, but still quite legible; the sheet bore the word *Agosti*—and the judge did not doubt that the colonel had intended to point out Agostini as his murderer. Nevertheless, Colomba della Rebbia, who had been summoned by the magistrate, asked leave to examine the note-book. After turning over the leaves for a few moments, she stretched out her hand toward the mayor and cried, " There stands the murderer! " Then with a precision and a clearness which were astonishing, considering the passion of sorrow that shook her, she related that, a few days previously, her father had received a letter from his son, which he had burned, but that before doing so he had written Orso's address (he had just changed his

garrison) in the note-book with his pencil. Now, his address was no longer in the note-book, and Colomba concluded that the mayor had torn out the leaf on which it was written, which probably was that on which her father had traced the murderer's name, and for that name the mayor, according to Colomba, had substituted Agostini's. The magistrate, in fact, noticed that one sheet was missing from the quire on which the name was written, but he remarked also that leaves were likewise missing from other quires in the same note-book, and certain witnesses testified that the colonel had a habit of tearing out pages when he wanted to light a cigar—therefore nothing was more probable than that, by an oversight, he had burned the address he had copied. Further, it was shown that the mayor could not have read the note-book on receiving it from Maddalena Pietri, on account of the darkness, and it was proved that he had not stopped an instant before he went into his house, that the sergeant of the gendarmes had gone there with him, and had seen him light a lamp and put the note-book into an envelope which he had sealed before his eyes.

When this officer had concluded his deposition, Colomba, half-distracted, cast herself at his feet, and besought him, by all he held most

sacred, to say whether he had not left the mayor alone for a single moment. After a certain amount of hesitation, the man, who was evidently affected by the young girl's excitement, admitted that he had gone into the next room to fetch a sheet of foolscap, but that he had not been away a minute, and that the mayor had talked to him all the time he was groping for the paper in a drawer. Moreover, he deposed that when he came back the blood-stained note-book was still on the table, in the very place where the mayor had thrown it when he first came in.

Monsieur Barricini gave his evidence with the utmost coolness. He made allowances, he said, for Mademoiselle della Rebbia's excitement, and was ready to condescend to justify himself. He proved that he had spent his whole evening in the village, that his son Vincentello had been with him in front of the house at the moment when the crime was committed, and that his son Orlanduccio, who had had an attack of fever that very day, had never left his bed. He produced every gun in his house, and not one of them had been recently discharged. He added, that, as regarded the note-book, he had at once realized its importance; that he had sealed it up, and placed it in the hands of his deputy, foreseeing that he himself might be suspected, on

account of his quarrel with the colonel. Finally, he reminded the court that Agostini had threatened to kill the man who had written a letter in his name, and he insinuated that this ruffian had probably suspected the colonel, and murdered him. Such a vengeance, for a similar reason, is by no means unprecedented in the history of brigandage.

Five days after Colonel della Rebbia's death, Agostini was surprised by a detachment of riflemen, and killed, fighting desperately to the last. On his person was found a letter from Colomba, beseeching him to declare whether he was guilty of the murder imputed to him, or not. As the bandit had sent no answer, it was pretty generally concluded that he had not the courage to tell a daughter he had murdered her father. Yet those who claimed to know Agostini's nature thoroughly, whispered that if he had killed the colonel he would have boasted of the deed. Another bandit, known by the name of Brandolaccio, sent Colomba a declaration in which he bore witness "on his honour" to his comrade's innocence—but the only proof he put forward was that Agostini had never told him that he suspected the colonel.

The upshot was that the Barricini suffered no inconvenience, the examining magistrate was

loud in his praise of the mayor, and the mayor, on his side, crowned his handsome behaviour by relinquishing all his claims over the stream, concerning which he had brought the lawsuit against Colonel della Rebbia.

According to the custom of her country, Colomba improvised a *ballata* in presence of her father's corpse, and before his assembled friends. In it she poured out all her hatred against the Barricini, formally charged them with the murder, and threatened them with her brother's vengeance. It was this same *ballata,* which had grown very popular, that the sailor had sung before Miss Lydia. When Orso, who was in the north of France, heard of his father's death, he applied for leave, but failed to obtain it. A letter from his sister led him to believe at first in the guilt of the Barricini, but he soon received copies of all the documents connected with the inquiry and a private letter from the judge, which almost convinced him that the bandit Agostini was the only culprit. Every three months Colomba had written to him, reiterating her suspicions, which she called her "proofs." In spite of himself, these accusations made his Corsican blood boil, and sometimes he was very near sharing his sister's prejudices. Nevertheless, every time he wrote to her he repeated his conviction

that her allegations possessed no solid foundation, and were quite unworthy of belief. He even forbade her, but always vainly, to mention them to him again.

Thus two years went by. At the end of that time Orso was placed on half-pay, and then it occurred to him to go back to his own country—not at all for the purpose of taking vengeance on people whom he believed innocent, but to arrange a marriage for his sister, and the sale of his own small property—if its value should prove sufficient to enable him to live on the Continent.

CHAPTER VII

WHETHER it was that the arrival of his sister had reminded Orso forcibly of his paternal home, or that Colomba's unconventional dress and manners made him feel shy before his civilized friends, he announced, the very next day, his determination to leave Ajaccio, and return to Pietranera. But he made the colonel promise that when he went to Bastia he would come and stay in his modest manor-house, and undertook, in return, to provide him with plenty of buck, pheasant, boar, and other game.

On the day before that of his departure Orso proposed that, instead of going out shooting, they should all take a walk along the shores of the gulf. With Miss Lydia on his arm he was able to talk in perfect freedom—for Colomba had stayed in the town to do her shopping, and the colonel was perpetually leaving the young people to fire shots at sea-gulls and gannets, greatly to the astonishment of the passers-by, who could not conceive why any man should waste his powder on such paltry game.

They were walking along the path leading

to the Greek Chapel, which commands the finest view to be had of the bay, but they paid no attention to it.

"Miss Lydia," said Orso, after a silence which had lasted long enough to become embarrassing, "tell me frankly, what do you think of my sister?"

"I like her very much," answered Miss Nevil. "Better than you," she added, with a smile; "for she is a true Corsican, and you are rather too civilized a savage!"

"Too civilized! Well, in spite of myself, I feel that I am growing a savage again, since I have set my foot on the island! A thousand horrid thoughts disturb and torment me, and I wanted to talk with you a little before I plunge into my desert!"

"You must be brave, monsieur! Look at your sister's resignation; she sets you an example!"

"Ah! do not be deceived! Do not believe in her resignation. She has not said a word to me as yet, but every look of hers tells me what she expects of me."

"What does she expect of you, then?"

"Oh, nothing! Except that I should try whether your father's gun will kill a man as surely as it kills a partridge."

"What an idea! You can actually believe that, when you have just acknowledged that she has said nothing to you yet? It really is too dreadful of you!"

"If her thoughts were not fixed on vengeance, she would have spoken to me at once about our father; she has never done it. She would have mentioned the names of those she considers—wrongly, I know—to be his murderers. But no; not a word! That is because we Corsicans, you see, are a cunning race. My sister realizes that she does not hold me completely in her power, and she does not choose to startle me while I may still escape her. Once she has led me to the edge of the precipice, and once I turn giddy there, she will thrust me into the abyss."

Then Orso gave Miss Nevil some details of his father's death, and recounted the principal proofs which had culminated in his belief that Agostini was the assassin.

"Nothing," he added, "has been able to convince Colomba. I saw that by her last letter. She has sworn the Barricini shall die, and—you see, Miss Nevil, what confidence I have in you!—they would not be alive now, perhaps, if one of the prejudices for which her uncivilized education must be the excuse had not convinced her

that the execution of this vengeance belongs to me, as head of her family, and that my honour depends upon it!"

"Really and truly, Monsieur della Rebbia!" said Miss Nevil, "you slander your sister!"

"No. As you have said it yourself, she is a Corsican; she thinks as they all think. Do you know why I was so sad yesterday?"

"No. But for some time past you have been subject to these fits of sadness. You were much pleasanter in the earlier days of our acquaintance."

"Yesterday, on the contrary, I was more cheery and happy than I generally am. I had seen how kind, how indulgent, you were to my sister. The colonel and I were coming home in a boat. Do you know what one of the boatmen said to me in his infernal *patois?* 'You've killed a deal of game, Ors' Anton', but you'll find Orlanduccio Barricini a better shot than you!'"

"Well, what was there so very dreadful in that remark? Are you so very much set upon being considered a skilful sportsman?"

"But don't you see the ruffian was telling me I shouldn't have courage to kill Orlanduccio!"

"Do you know, M. della Rebbia, you frighten me! The air of this island of yours seems not

only to give people fevers, but to drive them mad. Luckily we shall be leaving it soon!"

"Not without coming to Pietranera—you have promised my sister that."

"And if we were to fail in that promise, we should bring down some terrible vengeance on our heads, no doubt!"

"Do you remember that story your father was telling us, the other day, about the Indians who threatened the company's agents that, if they would not grant their prayer, they would starve themselves to death?"

"That means that you would starve yourself to death! I doubt it very much! You would go hungry for one day, and then Mademoiselle Colomba would bring you such a tempting *bruccio* * that you would quite relinquish your plan."

"Your jests are cruel, Miss Nevil. You might spare me. Listen, I am alone here; I have no one but you to prevent me from going mad, as you call it. You have been my guardian angel, and now——!"

"Now," said Miss Lydia gravely, "to steady this reason of yours, which is so easily shaken, you have the honour of a soldier and a man, and," she added, turning away to pluck a

* A sort of baked cream cheese, a national dish in Corsica.

flower, "if that will be any help to you, you have the memory of your guardian angel, too!"

"Ah, Miss Nevil, if I could only think you really take some interest!"

"Listen, M. della Rebbia," said Miss Nevil, with some emotion. "As you are a child, I will treat you as I would treat a child. When I was a little girl my mother gave me a beautiful necklace, which I had longed for greatly; but she said to me, 'Every time you put on this necklace, remember you do not know French yet.' The necklace lost some of its value in my eyes; it was a source of constant self-reproach. But I wore it, and in the end I knew French. Do you see this ring? It is an Egyptian scarabæus, found, if you please, in a pyramid. That strange figure, which you may perhaps take for a bottle, stands for '*human life.*' There are certain people in my country to whom this hieroglyphic should appear exceedingly appropriate. This, which comes after it, is a shield upon an arm, holding a lance: that means *struggle, battle.* Thus the two characters, together, form this motto, which strikes me as a fine one, '*Life is a battle.*' Pray do not fancy I can translate hieroglyphics at sight! It was a man learned in such matters who explained these to me. Here, I will give you my scarabæus. Whenever you

feel some wicked Corsican thought stir in you, look at my talisman, and tell yourself you must win the battle our evil passions wage against us. Why, really, I don't preach at all badly!"

"I shall think of you, Miss Nevil, and I shall say to myself——"

"Say to yourself you have a friend who would be in despair at the idea of your being hanged—and besides it would be too distressing for your ancestors the corporals!"

With these words she dropped Orso's arm, laughing and running to her father.

"Papa," she said, "do leave those poor birds alone, and come and make up poetry with us, in Napoleon's grotto!"

CHAPTER VIII

THERE is always a certain solemnity about a departure, even when the separation is only to be a short one. Orso and his sister were to start very early in the morning, and he had taken his leave of Miss Lydia the night before—for he had no hope that she would disturb her indolent habits on his account. Their farewells had been cold and grave. Since that conversation on the sea-shore, Miss Lydia had been afraid she had perhaps shown too strong an interest in Orso, and on the other hand, her jests, and more especially her careless tone, lay heavy on Orso's heart. At one moment he had thought the young Englishwoman's manner betrayed a budding feeling of affection, but now, put out of countenance by her jests, he told himself she only looked on him as a mere acquaintance, who would be soon forgotten. Great, therefore, was his surprise, next morning, when, as he sat at coffee with the colonel, he saw Miss Lydia come into the room, followed by his sister. She had risen at five o'clock, and for an Englishwoman, and espe-

cially for Miss Nevil, the effort was so great that it could not but give him some cause for vanity.

"I am so sorry you should have disturbed yourself so early," said Orso. "No doubt my sister woke you up in spite of all my injunctions, and you must hate us heartily! Perhaps you wish I was hanged already!"

"No," said Miss Lydia, very low and in Italian, evidently so that her father might not hear her, "but you were somewhat sulky with me yesterday, because of my innocent jokes, and I would not have you carry away an unpleasant recollection of your humble servant. What terrible people you are, you Corsicans! Well, good-bye! We shall meet soon, I hope."

And she held out her hand.

A sigh was the only answer Orso could find. Colomba came to his side, led him into a window, and spoke to him for a moment in an undertone, showing him something she held under her *mezzaro*.

"Mademoiselle," said Orso to Miss Nevil, "my sister is anxious to give you a very odd present, but we Corsicans have not much to offer —except our affection—which time never wipes out. My sister tells me you have looked with some curiosity at this dagger. It is an ancient possession in our family. It probably hung,

once upon a time, at the belt of one of those corporals, to whom I owe the honour of your acquaintance. Colomba thinks it so precious that she has asked my leave to give it to you, and I hardly know if I ought to grant it, for I am afraid you'll laugh at us!"

"The dagger is beautiful," said Miss Lydia. "But it is a family weapon; I can not accept it!"

"It's not my father's dagger," exclaimed Colomba eagerly; "it was given to one of mother's ancestors by King Theodore. If the signorina will accept it, she will give us great pleasure."

"Come, Miss Lydia," said Orso, "don't scorn a king's dagger!"

To a collector, relics of King Theodore are infinitely more precious than those of the most powerful of monarchs. The temptation was a strong one, and already Miss Lydia could see the effect the weapon would produce laid out on a lacquered table in her room at St. James's Place.

"But," said she, taking the dagger with the hesitating air of one who longs to accept, and casting one of her most delightful smiles on Colomba, "dear Signorina Colomba . . . I can not . . . I should not dare to let you depart thus, unarmed."

"My brother is with me," said Colomba

proudly, " and we have the good gun your father has given us. Orso, have you put a bullet in it? "

Miss Nevil kept the dagger, and to avert the danger consequent on *giving* instruments that cut or pierce to a friend, Colomba insisted on receiving a soldo in payment.

A start had to be made at last. Yet once again Orso pressed Miss Nevil's hand; Colomba kissed her, and then held up her rosy lips to the colonel, who was enchanted with this Corsican politeness. From the window of the drawing-room Miss Lydia watched the brother and sister mount their horses. Colomba's eyes shone with a malignant joy which she had never remarked in them before. The sight of this tall strong creature, with her fanatical ideas of savage honour, pride written on her forehead, and curled in a sardonic smile upon her lips, carrying off the young man with his weapons, as though on some death-dealing errand, recalled Orso's fears to her, and she fancied she beheld his evil genius dragging him to his ruin. Orso, who was already in the saddle, raised his head and caught sight of her. Either because he had guessed her thought, or desired to send her a last farewell, he took the Egyptian ring, which he had hung upon a ribbon, and carried it to his lips. Blushing, Miss Lydia stepped back from the window,

then returning to it almost at once, she saw the two Corsicans cantering their little ponies rapidly toward the mountains. Half an hour later the colonel showed them to her, through his glasses, riding along the end of the bay, and she noticed that Orso constantly turned his head toward the town. At last he disappeared behind the marshes, the site of which is now filled by a flourishing nursery garden.

Miss Lydia glanced at herself in the glass, and thought she looked pale.

"What must that young man think of me," said she, "and what did I think of him? And why did I think about him? . . . A travelling acquaintance! . . . What have I come to Corsica for? . . . Oh! I don't care for him! . . . No! no! and besides the thing is impossible . . . And Colomba . . . Fancy me sister-in-law to a *voceratrice,* who wears a big dagger!"

And she noticed she was still holding King Theodore's dagger in her hand. She tossed it on to her toilet table. "Colomba, in London, dancing at Almacks! . . . Good heavens! what a lion * that would be, to show off! . . .

* At this period this name was used in England for people who were the fashion because they had something extraordinary about them.

Perhaps she'd make a great sensation! . . . He loves me, I'm certain of it! He is the hero of a novel, and I have interrupted his adventurous career. . . . But did he really long to avenge his father in true Corsican fashion? . . . He was something between a Conrad and a dandy . . . I've turned him into nothing but a dandy! . . . And a dandy with a Corsican tailor! . . ."

She threw herself on her bed, and tried to sleep—but that proved an impossibility, and I will not undertake to continue her soliloquy, during which she declared, more than a hundred times over, that Signor della Rebbia had not been, was not, and never should be, anything to her.

CHAPTER IX

MEANWHILE Orso was riding along beside his sister. At first the speed at which their horses moved prevented all conversation, but when the hills grew so steep that they were obliged to go at a foot's pace, they began to exchange a few words about the friends from whom they had just parted. Colomba spoke with admiration of Miss Nevil's beauty, of her golden hair, and charming ways. Then she asked whether the colonel was really as rich as he appeared, and whether Miss Lydia was his only child.

"She would be a good match," said she. "Her father seems to have a great liking for you——"

And as Orso made no response, she added: "Our family was rich, in days gone by. It is still one of the most respected in the island. All these *signori* about us are bastards. * The only noble blood left is in the families of the corporals, and as you know, Orso, your ancestors

* The descendants of the feudal lords in Corsica are known as *signori*. There is a rivalry as regards birth between the *signori* and the *caporali*.

were the chief corporals in the island. You know our family came from beyond the hills,* and it was the civil wars that forced us over to this side. If I were you, Orso, I shouldn't hesitate—I should ask Colonel Nevil for his daughter's hand." Orso shrugged his shoulders. "With her fortune, you might buy the Falsetta woods, and the vineyards below ours. I would build a fine stone house, and add a story to the old tower in which Sambucuccio killed so many Moors in the days of Count Henry, *il bel Missere.*" †

"Colomba, you're talking nonsense," said Orso, cantering forward.

"You are a man, Ors' Anton', and of course you know what you ought to do better than any woman. But I should very much like to know what objection that Englishman could have to the marriage. Are there any corporals in England?"

After a somewhat lengthy ride, spent in talking in this fashion, the brother and sister reached

* Otherwise "from the eastern coast." The meaning of the expression "*di la dei monti*, which is in constant use, alters according to the geographical position of the person who employs it. A chain of mountains runs right through Corsica from north to south.

† See Filippini, Book II. Count Arrigo bel Missere died toward the year 1000. The story goes that at his death a voice was heard in the air singing these prophetic words:

"E morto il Conte Arrigo bel Missere
E Corsica sarà di male in peggio!"

a little village, not far from Bocognano, where they halted to dine and sleep at a friend's house. They were welcomed with a hospitality which must be experienced before it can be appreciated. The next morning, their host, who had stood godfather to a child to whom Madame della Rebbia had been godmother, accompanied them a league beyond his house.

"Do you see those woods and thickets?" said he to Orso, just as they were parting. "A man who had met with a misfortune might live there peacefully for ten years, and no gendarme or soldier would ever come to look for him. The woods run into the Vizzavona forest, and anybody who has friends at Bocognano or in the neighbourhood would want for nothing. That's a good gun you have there. It must carry a long way. Blood of the Madonna! What calibre! You might kill better game than boars with it!"

Orso answered, coldly, that his gun was of English make, and carried "the lead" a long distance. The friends embraced, and took their different ways.

Our travellers were drawing quite close to Pietranera, when, at the entrance of a little gorge, through which they had to pass, they beheld seven or eight men, armed with guns, some sitting on stones, others lying on the grass, others

standing up, and seemingly on the lookout. Their horses were grazing a little way off. Colomba looked at them for a moment, through a spy-glass which she took out of one of the large leathern pockets all Corsicans wear when on a journey.

"Those are our men!" she cried, with a well-pleased air. "Pieruccio has done his errand well!"

"What men?" inquired Orso.

"Our herdsmen," she replied. "I sent Pieruccio off yesterday evening to call the good fellows together, so that they may attend you home. It would not do for you to enter Pietranera without an escort, and besides, you must know the Barricini are capable of anything!"

"Colomba," said Orso, and his tone was severe, "I have asked you, over and over again, not to mention the Barricini and your groundless suspicions to me. I shall certainly not make myself ridiculous by riding home with all these loafers behind me, and I am very angry with you for having sent for them without telling me."

"Brother, you have forgotten the ways of your own country. It is my business to protect you, when your own imprudence exposes you to danger. It was my duty to do what I have done."

Just at this moment the herdsmen, who had caught sight of them, hastened to their horses, and galloped down the hill to meet them.

"Evviva Ors' Anton'!" shouted a brawny, white-bearded old fellow, wrapped, despite the heat, in a hooded cloak of Corsican cloth, thicker than the skins of his own goats. "The image of his father, only taller and stronger! What a splendid gun! There'll be talk about that gun, Ors' Anton'!"

"Evviva Ors' Anton'!" chorused the herdsmen. "We were sure you'd come back, at last!"

"Ah! Ors' Anton'!" cried a tall fellow, with a skin tanned brick red. "How happy your father would be, if he were here to welcome you! The dear, good man! You would have seen him now, if he would have listened to me—if he would have let me settle Guidice's business! . . . But he wouldn't listen to me, poor fellow! He knows I was right, now!"

"Well, well!" said the old man. "Guidice will lose nothing by waiting."

"Evviva Ors' Anton'!" And the reports of a dozen guns capped the plaudit.

Very much put out, Orso sat in the midst of the group of mounted men, all talking at once, and crowding round to shake hands with him.

For some time he could not make himself heard. At last, with the air he put on when he used to reprimand the men of his company, or send one of them to the guard-room, he said:

"I thank you, friends, for the affection you show for me, and for that which you felt for my father! But I do not want advice from any of you, and you must not offer it. I know my own duty."

"He's right! he's right!" cried the herdsmen. "You know you may reckon on us!"

"Yes, I do reckon on you. But at this moment I need no help, and no personal danger threatens me. Now face round at once, and be off with you to your goats. I know my way to Pietranera, and I want no guides."

"Fear nothing, Ors' Anton'," said the old man. "They would never dare to show their noses to-day. The mouse runs back to its hole when the tom-cat comes out!"

"Tom-cat yourself, old gray-beard!" said Orso. "What's your name?"

"What! don't you remember me, Ors' Anton'? I who have so often taken you up behind me on that biting mule of mine! You don't remember Polo Griffo? I'm an honest fellow, though, and with the della Rebbia, body and soul. Say but the word, and when that big gun

of yours speaks, this old musket of mine, as old as its master, shall not be dumb. Be sure of that, Ors' Anton'!"

"Well, well! But be off with you now, in the devil's name, and let us go on our way!"

At last the herdsmen departed, trotting rapidly off toward the village, but they stopped every here and there, at all the highest spots on the road, as though they were looking out for some hidden ambuscade, always keeping near enough to Orso and his sister to be able to come to their assistance if necessary. And old Polo Griffo said to his comrades:

"I understand him! I understand him! He'll not say what he means to do, but he'll do it. He's the born image of his father. Ah! you may say you have no spite against any one, my boy! But you've made your vow to Saint Nega.* Bravo! I wouldn't give a fig for the mayor's hide—there won't be the makings of a wineskin in it before the month is out!"

Preceded by this troop of skirmishers, the last descendant of the della Rebbia entered the village, and proceeded to the old mansion of his forefathers, the corporals. The Rebbianites, who had long been leaderless, had gathered to

* This saint is not mentioned in the calendar. To make a vow to Saint Nega means to deny everything deliberately.

welcome him, and those dwellers in the village who observed a neutral line of conduct all came to their doorsteps to see him pass by. The adherents of the Barricini remained inside their houses, and peeped out of the slits in their shutters.

The village of Pietranera is very irregularly built, like most Corsican villages—for indeed, to see a street, the traveller must betake himself to Cargese, which was built by Monsieur de Marbœuf. The houses, scattered irregularly about, without the least attempt at orderly arrangement, cover the top of a small plateau, or rather of a ridge of the mountain. Toward the centre of the village stands a great evergreen oak, and close beside it may be seen a granite trough, into which the water of a neighbouring spring is conveyed by a wooden pipe. This monument of public utility was constructed at the common expense of the della Rebbia and Barricini families. But the man who imagined this to be a sign of former friendship between the two families would be sorely mistaken. On the contrary, it is the outcome of their mutual jealousy. Once upon a time, Colonel della Rebbia sent a small sum of money to the Municipal Council of his commune to help to provide a fountain. The lawyer Barricini hastened to

forward a similar gift, and to this generous strife Pietranera owes its water supply. Round about the evergreen oak and the fountain there is a clear space, known as "the Square," on which the local idlers gather every night. Sometimes they play at cards, and once a year, in Carnival-time, they dance. At the two ends of the square stand two edifices, of greater height than breadth, built of a mixture of granite and schist. These are the *Towers* of the two opposing families, the Barricini and the della Rebbia. Their architecture is exactly alike, their height is similar, and it is quite evident that the rivalry of the two families has never been absolutely decided by any stroke of fortune in favour of either.

It may perhaps be well to explain what should be understood by this word, "Tower." It is a square building, some forty feet in height, which in any other country would be simply described as a pigeon-house. A narrow entrance-door, eight feet above the level of the ground, is reached by a very steep flight of steps. Above the door is a window, in front of which runs a sort of balcony, the floor of which is pierced with openings, like a machicolation, through which the inhabitants may destroy an unwelcome visitor without any danger to them-

selves. Between the window and the door are two escutcheons, roughly carved. One of these bears what was originally a Genoese cross, now so battered that nobody but an antiquary could recognise it. On the other are chiselled the arms of the family to whom the tower belongs. If the reader will complete this scheme of decoration by imagining several bullet marks on the escutcheons and on the window frames, he will have a fair idea of a Corsican mansion, dating from the middle ages. I had forgotten to add that the dwelling-house adjoins the tower, and is frequently connected with it by some interior passage.

The della Rebbia house and tower stand on the northern side of the square at Pietranera. The Barricini house and tower are on the southern side. Since the colonel's wife had been buried, no member of either family had ever been seen on any side of the square, save that assigned by tacit agreement to its own party. Orso was about to ride past the mayor's house when his sister checked him, and suggested his turning down a lane that would take them to their own dwelling without crossing the square at all.

"Why should we go out of our way?" said Orso. "Doesn't the square belong to everybody?" and he rode on.

"Brave heart!" murmured Colomba. ". . . My father! you will be avenged!"

When they reached the square, Colomba put herself between her brother and the Barricini mansion, and her eyes never left her enemy's windows. She noticed that they had been lately barricaded and provided with *archere*. *Archere* is the name given to narrow openings like loop-holes, made between the big logs of wood used to close up the lower parts of the windows. When an onslaught is expected, this sort of barricade is used, and from behind the logs the attacked party can fire at its assailants with ease and safety.

"The cowards!" said Colomba. "Look, brother, they have begun to protect themselves! They have put up barricades! But some day or other they'll have to come out."

Orso's presence on the southern side of the square made a great sensation at Pietranera, and was taken to be a proof of boldness savouring of temerity. It was subject of endless comment on the part of the neutrals, when they gathered around the evergreen oak, that night.

"It is a good thing," they said, "that Barricini's sons are not back yet, for they are not so patient as the lawyer, and very likely they would not have let their enemy set his foot on

their ground without making him pay for his bravado."

"Remember what I am telling you, neighbour," said an old man, the village oracle. "I watched Colomba's face to-day. She had some idea in her head. I smell powder in the air. Before long, butcher's meat will be cheap in Pietranera!"

CHAPTER X

ORSO had been parted from his father at so early an age that he had scarcely had time to know him. He had left Pietranera to pursue his studies at Pisa when he was only fifteen. Thence he had passed into the military school, and Ghilfuccio, meanwhile, was bearing the Imperial Eagles all over Europe. On the mainland, Orso only saw his father at rare intervals, and it was not until 1815 that he found himself in the regiment he commanded. But the colonel, who was an inflexible disciplinarian, treated his son just like any other sub-lieutenant—in other words, with great severity. Orso's memories of him were of two kinds: He recollected him, at Pietranera, as the father who would trust him with his sword, and would let him fire off his gun when he came in from a shooting expedition, or who made him sit down, for the first time, tiny urchin as he was, at the family dinner-table. Then he remembered the Colonel della Rebbia who would put him under arrest for some blunder, and who

never called him anything but Lieutenant della Rebbia.

"Lieutenant della Rebbia, you are not in your right place on parade. You will be confined to barracks three days."

"Your skirmishers are five yards too far from your main body—five days in barracks."

"It is five minutes past noon, and you are still in your forage-cap—a week in barracks."

Only once, at Quatre-Bras, he had said to him, "Well done, Orso! But be cautious!"

But, after all, these later memories were not connected in his mind with Pietranera. The sight of the places so familiar to him in his childish days, of the furniture he had seen used by his mother, to whom he had been fondly attached, filled his soul with a host of tender and painful emotions. Then the gloomy future that lay before him, the vague anxiety he felt about his sister, and, above all other things, the thought that Miss Nevil was coming to his house, which now struck him as being so small, so poor, so unsuited to a person accustomed to luxury—the idea that she might possibly despise it—all these feelings made his brain a chaos, and filled him with a sense of deep discouragement.

At supper he sat in the great oaken chair, blackened with age, in which his father had al-

ways presided at the head of the family table, and he smiled when he saw that Colomba hesitated to sit down with him. But he was grateful to her for her silence during the meal, and for her speedy retirement afterward. For he felt he was too deeply moved to be able to resist the attack she was no doubt preparing to make upon him. Colomba, however, was dealing warily with him, and meant to give him time to collect himself. He sat for a long time motionless, with his head on his hand, thinking over the scenes of the last fortnight of his life. He saw, with alarm, how every one seemed to be watching what would be his behaviour to the Barricini. Already he began to perceive that the opinion of Pietranera was beginning to be the opinion of all the world to him. He would have to avenge himself, or be taken for a coward! But on whom was he to take vengeance? He could not believe the Barricini to be guilty of murder. They were his family enemies, certainly, but only the vulgar prejudice of his fellow-countrymen could accuse them of being murderers. Sometimes he would look at Miss Nevil's talisman, and whisper the motto "Life is a battle!" over to himself. At last, in a resolute voice, he said, "I will win it!" Strong in that thought, he rose to his feet, took up the

lamp, and was just going up to his room, when he heard a knock at the door of the house. It was a very unusual hour for any visitor to appear. Colomba instantly made her appearance, followed by the woman who acted as their servant.

"It's nothing!" she said, hurrying to the door.

Yet before she opened it she inquired who knocked. A gentle voice answered, "It is I."

Instantly the wooden bar across the door was withdrawn, and Colomba reappeared in the dining-room, followed by a little ragged, barefooted girl of about ten years old, her head bound with a shabby kerchief, from which escaped long locks of hair, as black as the raven's wing. The child was thin and pale, her skin was sunburnt, but her eyes shone with intelligence. When she saw Orso she stopped shyly, and courtesied to him, peasant fashion—then she said something in an undertone to Colomba, and gave her a freshly killed pheasant.

"Thanks, Chili," said Colomba. "Thank your uncle for me. Is he well?"

"Very well, signorina, at your service. I couldn't come sooner because he was late. I waited for him in the *mâquis* for three hours."

"And you've had no supper?"

"Why no, signorina! I've not had time."

"You shall have some supper here. Has your uncle any bread left?"

"Very little, signorina. But what he is most short of is powder. Now the chestnuts are in, the only other thing he wants is powder."

"I will give you a loaf for him, and some powder, too. Tell him to use it sparingly—it is very dear."

"Colomba," said Orso in French, "on whom are you bestowing your charity?"

"On a poor bandit belonging to this village," replied Colomba in the same language. "This little girl is his niece."

"It strikes me you might place your gifts better. Why should you send powder to a ruffian who will use it to commit crimes? But for the deplorable weakness every one here seems to have for the bandits, they would have disappeared out of Corsica long ago."

"The worst men in our country are not those who are 'in the country.'" *

"Give them bread, if it so please you. But I will not have you supply them with ammunition."

"Brother," said Colomba, in a serious voice,

* To be *alla campagna*, otherwise to be a bandit. The word *bandit* is not a term of opprobrium; it is taken in the sense of *banished*, the *outlaw* of the old English ballads.

"you are master here, and everything in this house belongs to you. But I warn you that I will give this little girl my *mezzaro,* so that she may sell it, rather than refuse powder to a bandit. Refuse to give him powder! I might just as well make him over to the gendarmes! What has he to protect him against them, except his cartridges?"

All this while the little girl was ravenously devouring a bit of bread, and carefully watching Colomba and her brother, turn about, trying to read the meaning of what they were saying in their eyes.

"And what has this bandit of yours done? What crime has driven him into the *mâquis?*"

"Brandolaccio has not committed any crime," exclaimed Colomba. "He killed Giovan' Oppizo, who murdered his father while he was away serving in the army."

Orso turned away his head, took up the lamp, and, without a word, departed to his bedroom. Then Colomba gave the child food and gunpowder, and went with her as far as the house-door, saying over and over again:

"Mind your uncle takes good care of Orso!"

CHAPTER XI

IT was long before Orso fell asleep, and as a consequence he woke late—late for a Corsican, at all events. When he left his bed, the first object that struck his gaze was the house of his enemies, and the *archere* with which they had furnished it. He went downstairs and asked for his sister.

"She is in the kitchen, melting bullets," answered Saveria, the woman-servant.

So he could not take a step without being pursued by the image of war.

He found Colomba sitting on a stool, surrounded by freshly cast bullets, and cutting up strips of lead.

"What the devil are you doing?" inquired her brother.

"You had no bullets for the colonel's gun," she answered, in her soft voice. "I found I had a mould for that calibre, and you shall have four-and-twenty cartridges to-day, brother."

"I don't need them, thank God!"

"You mustn't be taken at a disadvantage, Ors' Anton'. You have forgotten your country, and the people who are about you."

"If I had forgotten, you would soon have reminded me. Tell me, did not a big trunk arrive here some days ago?"

"Yes, brother. Shall I take it up to your room?"

"You take it up! Why, you'd never be strong enough to lift it! . . . Is there no man about who can do it?"

"I'm not so weak as you think!" said Colomba, turning up her sleeves, and displaying a pair of round white arms, perfect in shape, but looking more than ordinarily strong. "Here, Saveria," said she to the servant; "come and help me!"

She was already lifting the trunk alone, when Orso came hastily to her assistance.

"There is something for you in this trunk, my dear Colomba," said he. "You must excuse the modesty of my gifts. A lieutenant on half-pay hasn't a very well-lined purse!"

As he spoke, he opened the trunk, and took out of it a few gowns, a shawl, and some other things likely to be useful to a young girl.

"What beautiful things!" cried Colomba. "I'll put them away at once, for fear they should be spoiled. I'll keep them for my wedding," she added, with a sad smile, "for I am in mourning now!"

And she kissed her brother's hand.

"It looks affected, my dear sister, to wear your mourning for so long."

"I have sworn an oath," said Colomba resolutely, "I'll not take off my mourning. . . . " And her eyes were riveted on the Barricini mansion.

"Until your wedding day?" said Orso, trying to avoid the end of her sentence.

"I shall never marry any man," said Colomba, "unless he has done three things . . ." And her eyes still rested gloomily on the house of the enemy.

"You are so pretty, Colomba, that I wonder you are not married already! Come, you must tell me about your suitors. And besides, I'm sure to hear their serenades. They must be good ones to please a great *voceratrice* like you."

"Who would seek the hand of a poor orphan girl? . . . And then, the man for whom I would change my mourning-dress will have to make the women over there put on mourning!"

"This is becoming a perfect mania," said Orso to himself. But to avoid discussion he said nothing at all.

"Brother," said Colomba caressingly, "I have something to give you, too. The clothes you are wearing are much too grand for this

country. Your fine cloth frock-coat would be in tatters in two days, if you wore it in the *mâquis*. You must keep it for the time when Miss Nevil comes."

Then, opening a cupboard, she took out a complete hunting dress.

"I've made you a velvet jacket, and here's a cap, such as our smart young men wear. I embroidered it for you, ever so long ago. Will you try them on?" And she made him put on a loose green velvet jacket, with a huge pocket at the back. On his head she set a pointed black velvet cap, embroidered with jet and silk of the same colour, and finished with a sort of tassel.

"Here is our father's *carchera,*" * she said. "His stiletto is in the pocket of the jacket. I'll fetch you his pistol."

"I look like a brigand at the Ambigu-Comique," said Orso, as he looked at himself in the little glass Saveria was holding up for him.

"Indeed you look first-rate, dressed like that, Ors' Anton'," said the old servant, "and the smartest *pinsuto* † in Bocognano or Bastelica is not braver."

* *Carchera*, a belt for cartridges. A pistol is worn fastened to the left side of it.

† *Pinsuto*, the name given to men who wear the pointed cap, *barreta pinsuta*.

Orso wore his new clothes at breakfast, and during that meal he told his sister that his trunk contained a certain number of books, that he was going to send to France and Italy for others, and intended she should study a great deal.

"For it really is disgraceful, Colomba," he added, "that a grown-up girl like you should still be ignorant of things that children on the mainland know as soon as they are weaned."

"You are quite right, brother," said Colomba. "I know my own shortcomings quite well, and I shall be too glad to learn—especially if you are kind enough to teach me."

Some days went by, and Colomba never mentioned the name of Barricini. She lavished care and attention on her brother, and often talked to him about Miss Nevil. Orso made her read French and Italian books, and was constantly being surprised either by the correctness and good sense of her comments, or by her utter ignorance on the most ordinary subjects.

One morning, after breakfast, Colomba left the room for a moment, and instead of returning as usual, with a book and some sheets of paper, reappeared with her *mezzaro* on her head. The expression of her countenance was even more serious than it generally was.

"Brother," she said, "I want you to come out with me."

"Where do you want me to go with you?" said Orso, holding out his arm.

"I don't want your arm, brother, but take your gun and your cartridge-pouch. A man should never go abroad without his arms."

"So be it. I must follow the fashion. Where are we going to?"

Colomba, without answering, drew her *mezzaro* closer about her head, called the watch-dog, and went out followed by her brother. Striding swiftly out of the village, she turned into a sunken road that wound among the vineyards, sending on the dog, to whom she made some gesture, which he seemed to understand, in front of her. He instantly began to run zigzag fashion, through the vines, first on one side and then on the other, always keeping within about fifty paces of his mistress, and occasionally stopping in the middle of the road and wagging his tail. He seemed to perform his duties as a scout in the most perfect fashion imaginable.

"If Muschetto begins to bark, brother," said Colomba, "cock your gun, and stand still."

Half a mile beyond the village, after making many detours, Colomba stopped short, just where there was a bend in the road. On that

spot there rose a little pyramid of branches, some of them green, some withered, heaped about three feet high. Above them rose the top of a wooden cross, painted black. In several of the Corsican cantons, especially those among the mountains, a very ancient custom, connected, it may be, with some pagan superstition, constrains every passer-by to cast either a stone or a branch on the spot whereon a man has died a violent death. For years and years—as long as the memory of his tragic fate endures—this strange offering goes on accumulating from day to day.

This is called the dead man's *pile*—his "*mucchio.*"

Colomba stopped before the heap of foliage, broke off an arbutus branch, and cast it on the pile.

"Orso," she said, "this is where your father died. Let us pray for his soul!"

And she knelt down. Orso instantly followed her example. At that moment the village church-bell tolled slowly for a man who had died during the preceding night. Orso burst into tears.

After a few minutes Colomba rose. Her eyes were dry, but her face was eager. She hastily crossed herself with her thumb, after the

fashion generally adopted by her compatriots, to seal any solemn oath, then, hurrying her brother with her, she took her way back to the village. They re-entered their house in silence. Orso went up to his room. A moment afterward Colomba followed him, carrying a small casket which she set upon the table. Opening it, she drew out a shirt, covered with great stains of blood.

"Here is your father's shirt, Orso!"

And she threw it across his knees. "Here is the lead that killed him!" And she laid two blackened bullets on the shirt.

"Orso! Brother!" she cried, throwing herself into his arms and clasping him desperately to her. "Orso, you will avenge him!"

In a sort of frenzy she kissed him, then kissed the shirt and the bullets, and went out of the room, leaving her brother sitting on his chair, as if he had been turned to stone. For some time Orso sat motionless, not daring to put the terrible relics away. At last, with an effort, he laid them back in their box, rushed to the opposite end of his room, and threw himself on his bed, with his face turned to the wall, and his head buried in his pillow, as though he were trying to shut out the sight of some ghost. His sister's last words rang unceasingly in his ears,

like the words of an oracle, fatal, inevitable, calling out to him for blood, and for innocent blood! I shall not attempt to depict the unhappy young man's sensations, which were as confused as those that overwhelm a madman's brain. For a long time he lay in the same position, without daring to turn his head. At last he got up, closed the lid of the casket, and rushed headlong out of the house, into the open country, moving aimlessly forward, whither he knew not.

By degrees, the fresh air did him good. He grew calmer, and began to consider his position, and his means of escape from it, with some composure. He did not, as my readers already know, suspect the Barricini of the murder, but he did accuse them of having forged Agostini's letter, and this letter, he believed, at any rate, had brought about his father's death. He felt it was impossible to prosecute them for the forgery. Now and then, when the prejudices or the instincts of his race assailed him, and suggested an easy vengeance—a shot fired at the corner of some path—the thought of his brother-officers, of Parisian drawing-rooms, and above all, of Miss Nevil, made him shrink from them in horror. Then his mind dwelt on his sister's reproaches, and all the Corsican within him justified her appeal, and even intensified its bitterness.

One hope alone remained to him, in this battle between his conscience and his prejudices—the hope that, on some pretext or other, he might pick a quarrel with one of the lawyer's sons, and fight a duel with him. The idea of killing the young man, either by a bullet or a sword-thrust, reconciled his French and Corsican ideas. This expedient adopted, he began to meditate means for its execution, and was feeling relieved already of a heavy burden, when other and gentler thoughts contributed still further to calm his feverish agitation. Cicero, in his despair at the death of his daughter Tullia, forgot his sorrow when he mused over all the fine things he might say about it. Mr. Shandy consoled himself by discourses of the same nature for the loss of his son. Orso cooled his blood by thinking that he would depict his state of mind to Miss Nevil, and that such a picture could not fail to interest that fair lady deeply.

He was drawing near the village, from which he had unconsciously travelled a considerable distance, when he heard the voice of a little girl, who probably believed herself to be quite alone, singing in a path that ran along the edge of the *mâquis*. It was one of those slow, monotonous airs consecrated to funeral dirges, and the child was singing the words:

"And when my son shall see again the dwelling of his father,
Give him that murdered father's cross; show him my shirt
blood-spattered."

"What's that you're singing, child?" said Orso, in an angry voice, as he suddenly appeared before her.

"Is that you, Ors' Anton'?" exclaimed the child, rather startled. "It is Signorina Colomba's song."

"I forbid you to sing it!" said Orso, in a threatening voice.

The child kept turning her head this way and that, as though looking about for a way of escape, and she would certainly have run off had she not been held back by the necessity of taking care of a large bundle which lay on the grass at her feet.

Orso felt ashamed of his own vehemence. What are you carrying there, little one?" said he, with all the gentleness he could muster. And as Chilina hesitated, he lifted up the linen that was wrapped round the bundle, and saw it contained a loaf of bread and other food.

"To whom are you bringing the loaf, my dear?" he asked again.

"You know quite well, Ors' Anton' : to my uncle."

"And isn't your uncle a bandit?"

"At your service, Ors' Anton'."

"If you met the gendarmes, they would ask you where you were going . . ."

"I should tell them," the child replied, at once, "that I was taking food to the men from Lucca who were cutting down the *mâquis*."

"And if you came across some hungry hunter who insisted on dining at your expense, and took your provisions away from you?"

"Nobody would dare! I would say they are for my uncle!"

"Well! he's not the sort of man to let himself be cheated of his dinner! . . . Is your uncle very fond of you?"

"Oh, yes, Ors' Anton'. Ever since my father died, he has taken care of my whole family—my mother and my little sister and me. Before mother was ill, he used to recommend her to rich people, who gave her employment. The mayor gives me a frock every year, and the priest has taught me my catechism, and how to read, ever since my uncle spoke to them about us. But your sister is kindest of all to us!"

Just at this moment a dog ran out on the pathway. The little girl put two of her fingers into her mouth and gave a shrill whistle; the dog came to her at once, fawned upon her, and then plunged swiftly into the thicket. Soon two men,

ill-dressed, but very well armed, rose up out of a clump of young wood a few paces from where Orso stood. It was as though they had crawled up like snakes through the tangle of cytisus and myrtle that covered the ground.

"Oh, Ors' Anton,' you're welcome!" said the elder of the two men. "Why, don't you remember me?"

"No!" said Orso, looking hard at him.

"Queer how a beard and a peaked cap alter a man! Come, monsieur, look at me well! Have you forgotten your old Waterloo men? Don't you remember Brando Savelli, who bit open more than one cartridge alongside of you on that unlucky day?"

"What! Is it you?" said Orso. "And you deserted in 1816!"

"Even so, sir. Faith! soldiering grows tiresome, and besides, I had a job to settle over in this country. Aha, Chili! you're a good girl! Give us our dinner at once; we're hungry. You've no notion what an appetite one gets in the *mâquis*. Who sent us this—was it Signorina Colomba or the mayor?"

"No, uncle, it was the miller's wife. She gave me this for you, and a blanket for my mother."

"What does she want of me?"

"She says the Lucchesi she hired to clear the *mâquis* are asking her five-and-thirty sous, and chestnuts as well—because of the fever in the lower parts of Pietranera."

"The lazy scamps! . . . I'll see to them! . . . Will you share our dinner, monsieur, without any ceremony? We've eaten worse meals together, in the days of that poor compatriot of ours, whom they have discharged from the army."

"No, I thank you heartily. They have discharged me, too!"

"Yes, so I heard. But I'll wager you weren't sorry for it. You have your own account to settle too. . . . Come along, curé," said the bandit to his comrade. "Let's dine! Signor Orso, let me introduce the curé. I'm not quite sure he is a curé. But he knows as much as any priest, at all events!"

"A poor student of theology, monsieur," quoth the second bandit, "who has been prevented from following his vocation. Who knows, Brandolaccio, I might have been Pope!"

"What was it that deprived the Church of your learning?" inquired Orso.

"A mere nothing—a bill that had to be settled, as my friend Brandolaccio puts it. One of my sisters had been making a fool of herself,

while I was devouring book-lore at Pisa University. I had to come home, to get her married. But her future husband was in too great a hurry; he died of fever three days before I arrived. Then I called, as you would have done in my place, on the dead man's brother. I was told he was married. What was I to do?"

"It really was puzzling! What did you do?"

"It was one of those cases in which one has to resort to the gunflint." *

"In other words?"

"I put a bullet in his head," said the bandit coolly.

Orso made a horrified gesture. Nevertheless, curiosity, and, it may be, his desire to put off the moment when he must return home, induced him to remain where he was, and continue his conversation with the two men, each of whom had at least one murder on his conscience.

While his comrade was talking, Brandolaccio was laying bread and meat in front of him. He helped himself—then he gave some food to his dog, whom he introduced to Orso under the name of Brusco, as an animal possessing a wonderful instinct for recognising a soldier, whatever might be the disguise he had assumed. Lastly,

* *La scaglia*, a very common expression.

he cut off a hunch of bread and a slice of raw ham, and gave them to his niece. "Oh, the merry life a bandit lives!" cried the student of theology, after he had swallowed a few mouthfuls. "You'll try it some day, perhaps, Signor della Rebbia, and you'll find out how delightful it is to acknowledge no master save one's own fancy!"

Hitherto the bandit had talked Italian. He now proceeded in French.

"Corsica is not a very amusing country for a young man to live in—but for a bandit, there's the difference! The women are all wild about us. I, as you see me now, have three mistresses in three different villages. I am at home in every one of them, and one of the ladies is married to a gendarme!"

"You know many languages, monsieur!" said Orso gravely.

"If I talk French, 'tis because, look you, *maxima debetur pueris reverentia!* We have made up our minds, Brandolaccio and I, that the little girl shall turn out well, and go straight."

"When she is turned fifteen," remarked Chilina's uncle, "I'll find a good husband for her. I have one in my eye already."

"Shall you make the proposal yourself?" said Orso.

"Of course! Do you suppose that any well-to-do man in this neighbourhood, to whom I said, 'I should be glad to see a marriage between your son and Michilina Savelli,' would require any pressing?"

"I wouldn't advise him to!" quoth the other bandit. "Friend Brandolaccio has rather a heavy hand!"

"If I were a rogue," continued Brandolaccio, "a blackguard, a forger, I should only have to hold my wallet open, and the five-franc pieces would rain into it."

"Then is there something inside your wallet that attracts them?" said Orso.

"Nothing. But if I were to write to a rich man, as some people have written, 'I want a hundred francs,' he would lose no time about sending them to me. But I'm a man of honour, monsieur."

"Do you know, Signor della Rebbia," said the bandit whom his comrade called the curé, "do you know that in this country, with all its simple habits, there are some wretches who make use of the esteem our passports" (and he touched his gun) "insure us, to draw forged bills in our handwriting?"

"I know it," said Orso, in a gruff tone; "but what bills?"

"Six months ago," said the bandit, "I was taking my walks abroad near Orezza, when a sort of lunatic came up to me, pulling off his cap to me even in the distance, and said: 'Oh, M. le Curé' (they always call me that), 'please excuse me—give me time. I have only been able to get fifty-five francs together! Honour bright, that's all I've been able to scrape up.' I, in my astonishment, said, 'Fifty-five francs! What do you mean, you rascal?' 'I mean sixty-five,' he replied; 'but as for the hundred francs you asked me to give you, it's not possible.' 'What! you villain! I ask you for a hundred francs? I don't know who you are.' Then he showed me a letter, or rather a dirty rag of paper, whereby he was summoned to deposit a hundred francs on a certain spot, on pain of having his house burned and his cows killed by Giocanto Castriconi—that's my name. And they had been vile enough to forge my signature! What annoyed me most was that the letter was written in *patois,* and was full of mistakes in spelling—I who won every prize at the university! I began by giving my rascal a cuff that made him twist round and round. 'Aha! you take me for a thief, blackguard that you are!' I said, and I gave him a hearty kick, you know where. Then feeling rather better, I went on,

'When are you to take the money to the spot mentioned in the letter?' 'This very day.' 'Very good, then take it there!' It was at the foot of a pine-tree, and the place had been exactly described. He brought the money, buried it at the foot of the tree, and came and joined me. I had hidden myself close by. There I staid, with my man, for six mortal hours, M. della Rebbia. I'd have staid three days, if it had been necessary. At the end of six hours a *Bastiaccio,* a vile money-lender, made his appearance.* As he bent down to take up the money, I fired, and I had aimed so well that, as he fell, his head dropped upon the coins he was unearthing. 'Now, rascal,' said I to the peasant, 'take your money, and never dare to suspect Giocanto Castriconi of a mean trick again!'

"The poor devil, all of a tremble, picked up his sixty-five francs without taking the trouble to wipe them. He thanked me, I gave him a good parting kick, and he may be running away still, for all I know."

"Ah, curé!" said Brandolaccio, "I envy you that shot! How you must have laughed!"

"I had hit the money-lender in the temple,"

* The Corsican mountaineers loathe the inhabitants of Bastia, whom they do not consider their fellow-countrymen at all. They never say *Bastiese.* They always say *Bastiaccio.* It is well known that the termination *accio* generally indicates contempt.

the bandit went on, "and that reminded me of Virgil's lines:

> . . . "'Liquefacto tempora plumbo
> Diffidit, ac multâ porrectum extendit arenâ.'

Liquefacto! Do you think, Signor Orso, that the rapidity with which a bullet flies through the air will melt it? You who have studied projectiles, tell me whether you think that idea is truth or fiction?"

Orso infinitely preferred discussing this question of physics to arguing with the licentiate as to the morality of his action. Brandolaccio, who did not find their scientific disquisition entertaining, interrupted it with the remark that the sun was just going to set.

"As you would not dine with us, Ors' Anton'," he said, "I advise you not to keep Mademoiselle Colomba waiting any longer. And then it is not always wise to be out on the roads after sunset. Why do you come out without a gun? There are bad folk about here—beware of them! You have nothing to fear to-day. The Barricini are bringing the prefect home with them. They have gone to meet him on the road, and he is to stop a day at Pietranera, before he goes on to Corte, to lay what they call a corner-stone—such stupid nonsense! He will sleep to-

night with the Barricini; but to-morrow they'll be disengaged. There is Vincentello, who is a good-for-nothing fellow, and Orlanduccio, who is not much better. . . . Try to come on them separately, one to-day, the other to-morrow. . . . But be on the lookout, that's all I have to say to you!"

"Thanks for the warning," said Orso. "But there is no quarrel between us. Until they come to look for me, I shall have nothing to say to them."

The bandit stuck his tongue in his cheek, and smacked it ironically, but he made no reply. Orso got up to go away.

"By the way," said Brandolaccio, "I haven't thanked you for your powder. It came just when I needed it. Now I have everything I want . . . at least I do still want shoes . . . but I'll make myself a pair out of the skin of a moufflon one of these days."

Orso slipped two five-franc pieces into the bandit's hand.

"It was Colomba who sent you the powder. This is to buy the shoes."

"Nonsense, lieutenant!" cried Brandolaccio, handing him back the two coins. "D'ye take me for a beggar? I accept bread and powder, but I won't have anything else!"

"We are both old soldiers, so I thought we might have given each other a lift. Well, good-bye to you!"

But before he moved away he had slipped the money into the bandit's wallet, unperceived by him.

"Good-bye, Ors' Anton'," quoth the theologian. "We shall meet again in the *mâquis,* some day, perhaps, and then we'll continue our study of Virgil."

Quite a quarter of an hour after Orso had parted company with these worthies, he heard a man running after him, as fast as he could go. It was Brandolaccio.

"This is too bad, lieutenant!" he shouted breathlessly, "really it is too bad! I wouldn't overlook the trick, if any other man had played it on me. Here are your ten francs. All my respects to Mademoiselle Colomba. You have made me run myself quite out of breath. Good-night!"

CHAPTER XII

ORSO found Colomba in a state of considerable anxiety because of his prolonged absence. But as soon as she saw him she recovered her usual serene, though sad, expression. During the evening meal the conversation turned on trivial subjects, and Orso, emboldened by his sister's apparent calm, related his encounter with the bandits, and even ventured on a joke or two concerning the moral and religious education that was being imparted to little Chilina, thanks to the care of her uncle and of his worthy colleague Signor Castriconi.

"Brandolaccio is an upright man," said Colomba; "but as to Castriconi, I have heard he is quite unprincipled."

"I think," said Orso, "that he is as good as Brandolaccio, and Brandolaccio is as good as he. Both of them are at open war with society. Their first crime leads them on to fresh ones, every day, and yet they are very likely not half so guilty as many people who don't live in the *mâquis*."

A flash of joy shone in his sister's eyes. "Yes," he continued, "these wretches have a code of honour of their own. It is a cruel prejudice, not a mean instinct of greed, that has forced them into the life they are leading."

There was a silence.

"Brother," said Colomba, as she poured out his coffee, "perhaps you have heard that Carlo-Battista Pietri died last night. Yes, he died of the marsh-fever."

"Who is Pietri?"

"A man belonging to this village, the husband of Maddalena, who took the pocket-book out of our father's hand as he was dying. His widow has been here to ask me to join the watchers, and sing something. You ought to come, too. They are our neighbours, and in a small place like this we can not do otherwise than pay them this civility."

"Confound these wakes, Colomba! I don't at all like my sister to perform in public in this way."

"Orso," replied Colomba, "every country pays honour to its dead after its own fashion. The *ballata* has come down to us from our forefathers, and we must respect it as an ancient custom. Maddalena does not possess the 'gift,' and old Fiordispina, the best *voceratrice* in the

country, is ill. They must have somebody for the *ballata*."

"Do you believe Carlo-Battista won't find his way safely into the next world unless somebody sings bad poetry over his bier? Go if you choose, Colomba—I'll go with you, if you think I ought. But don't improvise! It really is not fitting at your age, and—sister, I beg you not to do it!"

"Brother, I have promised. It is the custom here, as you know, and, I tell you again, there is nobody but me to improvise."

"An idiotic custom it is!"

"It costs me a great deal to sing in this way. It brings back all our own sorrows to me. I shall be ill after it, to-morrow. But I must do it. Give me leave to do it. Brother, remember that when we were at Ajaccio, you told me to improvise to amuse that young English lady who makes a mock of our old customs. So why should I not do it to-day for these poor people, who will be grateful to me, and whom it will help to bear their grief?"

"Well, well, as you will. I'll go bail you've composed your *ballata* already, and don't want to waste it."

"No, brother, I couldn't compose it beforehand. I stand before the dead person, and I

think about those he has left behind him. The tears spring into my eyes, and then I sing whatever comes into my head."

All this was said so simply that it was quite impossible to suspect Signorina Colomba of the smallest poetic vanity. Orso let himself be persuaded, and went with his sister to Pietri's house. The dead man lay on a table in the largest room, with his face uncovered. All the doors and windows stood open, and several tapers were burning round the table. At the head stood the widow, and behind her a great many women, who filled all one side of the room. On the other side were the men, in rows, bareheaded, with their eyes fixed on the corpse, all in the deepest silence. Each new arrival went up to the table, kissed the dead face,* bowed his or her head to the widow and her son, and joined the circle, without uttering a word. Nevertheless, from time to time one of the persons present would break the solemn silence with a few words, addressed to the dead man.

"Why hast thou left thy good wife?" said one old crone. "Did she not take good care of thee? What didst thou lack? Why not have waited another month? Thy daughter-in-law would have borne thee a grandson!" A tall

* This custom still exists at Bocognano (1840).

young fellow, Pietri's son, pressed his father's cold hand and cried: "Oh! why hast thou not died of the *mala morte?* * Then we could have avenged thee!"

These were the first words to fall on Orso's ear as he entered the room. At the sight of him the circle parted, and a low murmur of curiosity betrayed the expectation roused in the gathering by the *voceratrice's* presence. Colomba embraced the widow, took one of her hands, and stood for some moments wrapped in meditation, with her eyelids dropped. Then she threw back her *mezzaro,* gazed fixedly at the corpse, and bending over it, her face almost as waxen as that of the dead man, she began thus:

"Carlo-Battista! May Christ receive thy soul! . . . To live is to suffer! Thou goest to a place . . . where there is neither sun nor cold. . . . No longer dost thou need thy pruning-hook . . . nor thy heavy pick. . . . There is no more work for thee! . . . Henceforward all thy days are Sundays! . . . Carlo-Battista! May Christ receive thy soul! . . . Thy son rules in thy house. . . . I have seen the oak fall, . . . dried up by the *libeccio.* . . . I thought it was dead indeed, . . . but when I passed it again, its root

* *La mala morte,* a violent death.

. . . had thrown up a sapling. . . . The sapling grew into an oak . . . of mighty shade. . . . Under its great branches, Maddele, rest thee well! . . . And think of the oak that is no more!"

Here Maddalena began to sob aloud, and two or three men who, on occasion, would have shot at a Christian as coolly as at a partridge, brushed big tears off their sunburnt faces.

For some minutes Colomba continued in this strain, addressing herself sometimes to the corpse, sometimes to the family, and sometimes, by a personification frequently employed in the *ballata,* making the dead man himself speak words of consolation or counsel to his kinsfolk. As she proceeded, her face assumed a sublime expression, a delicate pink tinge crept over her features, heightening the brilliancy of her white teeth and the lustre of her flashing eyes. She was like a Pythoness on her tripod. Save for a sigh here and there, or a strangled sob, not the slightest noise rose from the assembly that crowded about her. Orso, though less easily affected than most people by this wild kind of poetry, was soon overcome by the general emotion. Hidden in a dark corner of the room, he wept as heartily as Pietri's own son.

Suddenly a slight stir was perceptible among

the audience. The circle opened, and several strangers entered. The respect shown them, and the eagerness with which room was made for them, proved them to be people of importance, whose advent was a great honour to the household. Nevertheless, out of respect for the *ballata,* nobody said a word to them. The man who had entered first seemed about forty years of age. From his black coat, his red rosette, his confident air, and look of authority, he was at once guessed to be the prefect. Behind him came a bent old man with a bilious-looking complexion, whose furtive and anxious glance was only partially concealed by his green spectacles. He wore a black coat, too large for him, and which, though still quite new, had evidently been made several years previously. He always kept close beside the prefect and looked as though he would fain hide himself under his shadow. Last of all, behind him, came two tall young men, with sunburnt faces, their cheeks hidden by heavy whiskers, proud and arrogant-looking, and showing symptoms of an impertinent curiosity. Orso had had time to forget the faces of his village neighbours; but the sight of the old man in green spectacles instantly called up old memories in his mind. His presence in attendance on the prefect sufficed to insure his recognition. This

was Barricini, the lawyer, mayor of Pietranera, who had come, with his two sons, to show the prefect what a *ballata* was. It would be difficult exactly to describe what happened within Orso's soul at that moment, but the presence of his father's foe filled him with a sort of horror, and more than ever he felt inclined to yield to the suspicions with which he had been battling for so long.

As to Colomba, when she saw the man against whom she had sworn a deadly hatred, her mobile countenance assumed a most threatening aspect. She turned pale, her voice grew hoarse, the line she had begun to declaim died on her lips. But soon, taking up her *ballata* afresh, she proceeded with still greater vehemence.

"When the hawk bemoans himself . . . beside his harried nest, . . . the starlings flutter round him . . . insulting his distress."

A smothered laugh was heard. The two young men who had just come in doubtless considered the metaphor too bold.

"The falcon will rouse himself. . . . He will spread his wings. . . . He will wash his beak in blood! . . . Now, to thee, Carlo-Battista, let thy friends . . . bid an eternal

farewell! . . . Long enough have their tears flowed! . . . Only the poor orphan girl will not weep for thee! . . . Wherefore should she moan? . . . Thou hast fallen asleep, full of years, . . . in the midst of thine own kin, . . . ready to appear . . . in the presence of the Almighty. . . . The orphan weeps for her father . . . overtaken by vile murderers, . . . struck from behind. . . . For her father, whose blood lies red . . . beneath the heaped-up green leaves. . . . But she has gathered up this blood, . . . this innocent and noble blood! . . . She has poured it out over Pietranera . . . that it may become a deadly poison. . . . And the mark shall be on Pietranera . . . until the blood of the guilty . . . shall have wiped out the blood of the innocent man!"

As Colomba pronounced the last words, she dropped into a chair, drew her *mezzaro* over her face, and was heard sobbing beneath it. The weeping women crowded round the *improvisatrice;* several of the men were casting savage glances at the mayor and his sons; some of the elders began to protest against the scandal to which their presence had given rise. The dead man's son pushed his way through the throng,

and was about to beg the mayor to clear out with all possible speed. But this functionary had not waited for the suggestion. He was on his way to the door, and his two sons were already in the street. The prefect said a few words of condolence to young Pietri, and followed them out, almost immediately. Orso went to his sister's side, took her arm, and drew her out of the room.

"Go with them," said young Pietri to some of his friends. "Take care no harm comes to them!"

Hastily two or three young men slipped their stilettos up the left sleeves of their jackets and escorted Orso and his sister to their own door.

CHAPTER XIII

PANTING, exhausted, Colomba was utterly incapable of uttering a single word. Her head rested on her brother's shoulder, and she clasped one of his hands tightly between her own. Orso, though secretly somewhat annoyed by her peroration, was too much alarmed to reprove her, even in the mildest fashion. He was silently waiting till the nervous attack from which she seemed to be suffering should have passed, when there was a knock at the door, and Saveria, very much flustered, announced the prefect. At the words, Colomba rose, as though ashamed of her weakness, and stood leaning on a chair, which shook visibly beneath her hand.

The prefect began with some commonplace apology for the unseasonable hour of his visit, condoled with Mademoiselle Colomba, touched on the danger connected with strong emotions, blamed the custom of composing funeral dirges, which the very talent of the *voceratrice* rendered the more harrowing to her auditors, skilfully slipped in a mild reproof concerning the

tendency of the improvisation just concluded, and then, changing his tone—

"M. della Rebbia," he said, "I have many messages for you from your English friends. Miss Nevil sends her affectionate regards to your sister. I have a letter for you from her."

"A letter from Miss Nevil!" cried Orso.

"Unluckily I have not got it with me. But you shall have it within five minutes. Her father has not been well. For a little while we were afraid he had caught one of our terrible fevers. Luckily he is all right again, as you will observe for yourself, for I fancy you will see him very soon."

"Miss Nevil must have been very much alarmed!"

"Fortunately she did not become aware of the danger till it was quite gone by. M. della Rebbia, Miss Nevil has talked to me a great deal about you and about your sister."

Orso bowed.

"She has a great affection for you both. Under her charming appearance, and her apparent frivolity, a fund of good sense lies hidden."

"She is a very fascinating person," said Orso.

"I have come here, monsieur, almost at her

prayer. Nobody is better acquainted than I with a fatal story which I would fain not have to recall to you. As M. Barricini is still the mayor of Pietranera, and as I am prefect of the department, I need hardly tell you what weight I attach to certain suspicions which, if I am rightly informed, some incautious individuals have communicated to you, and which you, I know, have spurned with the indignation your position and your character would have led me to expect."

"Colomba," said Orso, moving uneasily on his chair. "You are very tired. You had better go to bed."

Colomba shook her head. She had recovered all her usual composure, and her burning eyes were fixed on the prefect.

"M. Barricini," the prefect continued, "is exceedingly anxious to put an end to the sort of enmity . . . or rather, the condition of uncertainty, existing between yourself and him. . . . On my part, I should be delighted to see you both in those relations of friendly intercourse appropriate to people who certainly ought to esteem each other."

"Monsieur," replied Orso in a shaking voice, "I have never charged Barricini with my father's murder. But he committed an act which must

always prevent me from having anything to do with him. He forged a threatening letter, in the name of a certain bandit, or at least he hinted in an underhand sort of way that it was forged by my father. That letter, monsieur, was probably the indirect cause of my father's death."

The prefect sat thinking for a moment.

"That your father should have believed that, when his own hasty nature led him into a law-suit with Signor Barricini, is excusable. But such blindness on your part really can not be admitted. Pray consider that Barricini could have served no interest of his own by forging the letter. I will not talk to you about his character, for you are not acquainted with it, and are prejudiced against it; but you can not suppose that a man conversant with the law——"

"But, monsieur," said Orso, rising to his feet, "be good enough to recollect that when you tell me the letter was not Barricini's work, you ascribe it to my father. And my father's honour, monsieur, is mine!"

"No man on earth, sir, is more convinced of Colonel della Rebbia's honour than myself! But the writer of the letter is now known."

"Who wrote it?" exclaimed Colomba, making a step toward the prefect.

"A villain, guilty of several crimes—such crimes as you Corsicans never pardon—a thief, one Tomaso Bianchi, at present confined in the prison at Bastia, has acknowledged that he wrote the fatal letter."

"I know nothing of the man," said Orso. "What can have been his object?"

"He belongs to this neighbourhood," said Colomba. "He is brother to a man who was our miller—a scamp and a liar, unworthy of belief."

"You will soon see what his interest in the matter was," continued the prefect. "The miller of whom your sister speaks—I think his name was Teodoro—was the tenant of a mill belonging to the colonel, standing on the very stream the ownership of which M. Barricini was disputing with your father. The colonel, always a generous man, made very little profit out of the mill. Now Tomaso thought that if Barricini got possession of the stream there would be a heavy rent to pay, for it is well known that Barricini is rather fond of money. In short, to oblige his brother, Tomaso forged the letter from the bandit—and there's the whole story. You know that in Corsica the strength of the family tie is so great that it does sometimes lead to crime. Please read over this letter to

me from the attorney-general. It confirms what I have just told you."

Orso looked through the letter, which gave a detailed relation of Tomaso's confession, and Colomba read it over his shoulder.

When she had come to the end of it she exclaimed:

"Orlanduccio Barricini went down to Bastia a month ago, when it became known that my brother was coming home. He must have seen Tomaso, and bought this lie of him!"

"Signorina," said the prefect, out of patience, "you explain everything by odious imputations! Is that the way to find out the truth? You, sir, can judge more coolly. Tell me what you think of the business now? Do you believe, like this young lady, that a man who has only a slight sentence to fear would deliberately charge himself with forgery, just to oblige a person he doesn't know?"

Orso read the attorney-general's letter again, weighing every word with the greatest care—for now that he had seen the old lawyer, he felt it more difficult to convince himself than it would have been a few days previously. At last he found himself obliged to admit that the explanation seemed to him to be satisfactory. But Colomba cried out vehemently:

"Tomaso Bianchi is a knave! He'll not be convicted, or he'll escape from prison! I am certain of it!"

The prefect shrugged his shoulders.

"I have laid the information I have received before you, monsieur. I will now depart, and leave you to your own reflections. I shall wait till your own reason has enlightened you, and I trust it may prove stronger than your sister's suppositions."

Orso, after saying a few words of excuse for Colomba, repeated that he now believed Tomaso to be the sole culprit.

The prefect had risen to take his leave.

"If it were not so late," said he, "I would suggest your coming over with me to fetch Miss Nevil's letter. At the same time you might repeat to M. Barricini what you have just said to me, and the whole thing would be settled."

"Orso della Rebbia will never set his foot inside the house of a Barricini!" exclaimed Colomba impetuously.

"This young lady appears to be the *tintinajo** of the family!" remarked the prefect, with a touch of irony.

* This is the name given to the ram or he-goat which wears a bell and leads the flock, and it is applied, metaphorically, to any member of a family who guides it in all important matters.

"Monsieur," replied Colomba resolutely, "you are deceived. You do not know the lawyer. He is the most cunning and knavish of men. I beseech you not to make Orso do a thing that would overwhelm him with dishonour!"

"Colomba!" exclaimed Orso, "your passion has driven you out of your senses!"

"Orso! Orso! By the casket I gave you, I beseech you to listen to me! There is blood between you and the Barricini. You shall not go into their house!"

"Sister!"

"No, brother, you shall not go! Or I will leave this house, and you will never see me again! Have pity on me, Orso!" and she fell on her knees.

"I am grieved," said the prefect, "to find Mademoiselle Colomba so unreasonable. You will convince her, I am sure."

He opened the door and paused, seeming to expect Orso to follow him.

"I can not leave her now," said Orso. "To-morrow, if——"

"I shall be starting very early," said the prefect.

"Brother," cried Colomba, clasping her hands, "wait till to-morrow morning, in any

case. Let me look over my father's papers. You can not refuse me that!"

"Well, you shall look them over to-night. But at all events you shall not torment me afterward with your violent hatreds. A thousand pardons, monsieur! I am so upset myself to-night—it had better be to-morrow."

"The night brings counsel," said the prefect, as he went out. "I hope all your uncertainty will have disappeared by to-morrow."

"Saveria," Colomba called, "take the lantern and attend the Signor Prefetto. He will give you a letter to bring back to my brother."

She added a few words which reached Saveria's ear alone.

"Colomba," said Orso, when the prefect was gone, "you have distressed me very much. Will no evidence convince you?"

"You have given me till to-morrow," she replied. "I have very little time; but I still have some hope."

Then she took a bunch of keys and ran up to a room on the upper story. There he could hear her pulling open drawers, and rummaging in the writing-desk in which Colonel della Rebbia had kept his business papers.

CHAPTER XIV

SAVERIA was a long time away, and when she at last reappeared, carrying a letter, and followed by little Chilina, rubbing her eyes, and evidently just waked out of her beauty sleep, Orso was wound up to the highest possible pitch of impatience.

"Child," said Orso, "what are you doing here at this hour?"

"The signorina sent for me," replied Chilina.

"What the devil does she want with her?" thought Orso to himself. But he was in a hurry to open Miss Lydia's letter, and while he was reading it Chilina went upstairs to his sister's room.

"My father, dear sir, has not been well," Miss Nevil wrote, "and he is so indolent, besides, that I am obliged to act as his secretary. You remember that, instead of admiring the landscape with you and me the other day, he got his feet wet on the sea-shore—and in your delightful island, that is quite enough to give one a fever! I can see the face you are making!

No doubt you are feeling for your dagger. But I will hope you have none now. Well, my father had a little fever, and I had a great fright. The prefect, whom I still persist in thinking very pleasant, sent us a doctor, also a very pleasant man, who got us over our trouble in two days. There has been no return of the attack, and my father would like to begin to shoot again. But I have forbidden that. How did you find matters in your mountain home? Is your North Tower still in its old place? Are there any ghosts about it? I ask all these questions because my father remembers you have promised him buck and boar and moufflon—is that the right name for those strange creatures? We intend to crave your hospitality on our way to Bastia, where we are to embark, and I trust the della Rebbia Castle, which you declare is so old and tumble-down, will not fall in upon our heads! Though the prefect is so pleasant that subjects of conversation are never lacking to us—I flatter myself, by the way, that I have turned his head—we have been talking about your worshipful self. The legal people at Bastia have sent him certain confessions, made by a rascal they have under lock and key, which are calculated to destroy your last remaining suspicions. The enmity which sometimes alarmed me for you must

therefore end at once. You have no idea what a pleasure this has been to me! When you started hence with the fair *voceratrice,* with your gun in hand, and your brow lowering, you struck me as being more Corsican than ever—too Corsican indeed! *Basta!* I write you this long letter because I am dull. The prefect, alas! is going away. We will send you a message when we start for your mountains, and I shall take the liberty of writing to Signorina Colomba to ask her to give me a *bruccio, ma solenne!* Meanwhile, give her my love. I use her dagger a great deal to cut the leaves of a novel I brought with me. But the doughty steel revolts against such usage, and tears my book for me, after a most pitiful fashion. Farewell, sir! My father sends you 'his best love.' Listen to what the prefect says. He is a sensible man, and is turning out of his way, I believe, on your account. He is going to lay a foundation-stone at Corte. I should fancy the ceremony will be very imposing, and I am very sorry not to see it. A gentleman in an embroidered coat and silk stockings and a white scarf, wielding a trowel —and a speech! And at the end of the performance manifold and reiterated shouts of 'God save the King.' I say again, sir, it will make you very vain to think I have written you

four whole pages, and on that account I give you leave to write me a very long letter. By the way, I think it very odd of you not to have let me hear of your safe arrival at the Castle of Pietranera!

"LYDIA.

"P. S.—I beg you will listen to the prefect, and do as he bids you. We have agreed that this is the course you should pursue, and I shall be very glad if you do it."

Orso read the letter three or four times over, making endless mental comments each time as he read. Then he wrote a long answer, which he sent by Saveria's hand to a man in the village, who was to go down to Ajaccio the very next day. Already he had almost dismissed the idea of discussing his grievance, true or false, against the Barricini, with his sister. Miss Lydia's letter had cast a rose-coloured tint over everything about him. He felt neither hatred nor suspicion now. He waited some time for his sister to come down, and finding she did not reappear, he went to bed, with a lighter heart than he had carried for many a day. Colomba, having dismissed Chilina with some secret instructions, spent the greater part of the night in reading old papers. A little before daybreak a

few tiny pebbles rattled against the window-pane. At the signal, she went down to the garden, opened a back door, and conducted two very rough men into her house. Her first care was to bring them into the kitchen and give them food. My readers will shortly learn who these men were.

CHAPTER XV

TOWARD six o'clock next morning one of the prefect's servants came and knocked at the door of Orso's house. He was received by Colomba, and informed her the prefect was about to start, and was expecting her brother. Without a moment's hesitation Colomba replied that her brother had just had a fall on the stairs, and sprained his foot; that he was unable to walk a single step, that he begged the prefect to excuse him, and would be very grateful if he would condescend to take the trouble of coming over to him. A few minutes after this message had been despatched, Orso came downstairs, and asked his sister whether the prefect had not sent for him.

With the most perfect assurance she rejoined:

"He begs you'll wait for him here."

Half an hour went by without the slightest perceptible stir in the Barricini dwelling. Meanwhile Orso asked Colomba whether she had discovered anything. She replied that she proposed to make her statement when the prefect came.

She affected an extreme composure. But her colour and her eyes betrayed her state of feverish excitement.

At last the door of the Barricini mansion was seen to open. The prefect came out first, in travelling garb; he was followed by the mayor and his two sons. What was the stupefaction of the inhabitants of the village of Pietranera, who had been on the watch since sunrise for the departure of the chief magistrate of their department, when they saw him go straight across the square and enter the della Rebbia dwelling, accompanied by the three Barricini. "They are going to make peace!" exclaimed the village politicians.

"Just as I told you," one old man went on. "Ors' Anton' has lived too much on the mainland to carry things through like a man of mettle."

"Yet," responded a Rebbianite, "you may notice it is the Barricini who have gone across to him. They are suing for mercy."

"It's the prefect who has wheedled them all round," answered the old fellow. "There is no such thing as courage nowadays, and the young chaps make no more fuss about their father's blood than if they were all bastards."

The prefect was not a little astounded to find

Orso up and walking about with perfect ease. In the briefest fashion Colomba avowed her own lie, and begged him to forgive it.

"If you had been staying anywhere else, monsieur, my brother would have gone to pay his respects to you yesterday."

Orso made endless apologies, vowing he had nothing to do with his sister's absurd stratagem, by which he appeared deeply mortified. The prefect and the elder Barricini appeared to believe in the sincerity of his regret, and indeed this belief was justified by his evident confusion and the reproaches he addressed to his sister. But the mayor's two sons did not seem satisfied.

"We are being made to look like fools," said Orlanduccio audibly.

"If my sister were to play me such tricks," said Vincentello, "I'd soon cure her fancy for beginning them again."

The words, and the tone in which they were uttered, offended Orso, and diminished his goodwill. Glances that were anything but friendly were exchanged between him and the two young men.

Meanwhile, everybody being seated save Colomba, who remained standing close to the kitchen door, the prefect took up his parable, and after a few commonplaces as to local prej-

udices, he recalled the fact that the most inveterate enmities generally have their root in some mere misunderstanding. Next, turning to the mayor, he told him that Signor della Rebbia had never believed the Barricini family had played any part, direct or indirect, in the deplorable event which had bereft him of his father; that he had, indeed, nursed some doubts as to one detail in the lawsuit between the two families; that Signor Orso's long absence, and the nature of the information sent him, excused the doubt in question; that in the light of recent revelations he felt completely satisfied, and desired to re-open friendly and neighbourly relations with Signor Barricini and his sons.

Orso bowed stiffly. Signor Barricini stammered a few words that nobody could hear, and his sons stared steadily at the ceiling rafters. The prefect was about to continue his speech, and address the counterpart of the remarks he had made to Signor Barricini, to Orso, when Colomba stepped gravely forward between the contracting parties, at the same time drawing some papers from beneath her neckerchief.

"I should be happy indeed," she said, "to see the quarrel between our two families brought to an end. But if the reconciliation is to be sincere, there must be a full explanation, and

nothing must be left in doubt. Signor Prefetto, Tomaso Bianchi's declaration, coming from a man of such vile report, seemed to me justly open to doubt. I said your sons had possibly seen this man in the prison at Bastia."

"It's false!" interrupted Orlanduccio; "I didn't see him!"

Colomba cast a scornful glance at him, and proceeded with great apparent composure.

"You explained Tomaso's probable interest in threatening Signor Barricini, in the name of a dreaded bandit, by his desire to keep his brother Teodoro in possession of the mill which my father allowed him to hire at a very low rent."

"That's quite clear," assented the prefect.

"Where was Tomaso Bianchi's interest?" exclaimed Colomba triumphantly. "His brother's lease had run out. My father had given him notice on the 1st of July. Here is my father's account-book; here is his note of the warning given to Teodoro, and the letter from a business man at Ajaccio suggesting a new tenant."

As she spoke she gave the prefect the papers she had been holding in her hand.

There was an astonished pause. The mayor turned visibly pale. Orso, knitting his brows, leaned forward to look at the papers, which the prefect was perusing most attentively.

"We are being made to look like fools!" cried Orlanduccio again, springing angrily to his feet. "Let us be off, father! We ought never to have come here!"

One instant's delay gave Signor Barricini time to recover his composure. He asked leave to see the papers. Without a word the prefect handed them over to him. Pushing his green spectacles up to his forehead, he looked through them with a somewhat indifferent air, while Colomba watched him with the eyes of a tigress who sees a buck drawing near to the lair where she has hidden her cubs.

"Well," said Signor Barricini, as he pulled down his spectacles and returned the documents, "knowing the late colonel's kind heart, Tomaso thought—most likely he thought—that the colonel would change his mind about the notice. As a matter of fact, Bianchi is still at the mill, so——"

"It was I," said Colomba, and there was scorn in her voice, "who left him there. My father was dead, and situated as I was, I was obliged to treat my brother's dependents with consideration."

"Yet," quoth the prefect, "this man Tomaso acknowledges that he wrote the letter. That much is clear."

"The thing that is clear to me," broke in Orso, "is that there is some vile infamy underneath this whole business."

"I have to contradict another assertion made by these gentlemen," said Colomba.

She threw open the door into the kitchen and instantly Brandolaccio, the licentiate in theology, and Brusco, the dog, marched into the room. The two bandits were unarmed—apparently, at all events; they wore their cartridge belts, but the pistols, which are their necessary complement, were absent. As they entered the room they doffed their caps respectfully.

The effect produced by their sudden appearance may be conceived. The mayor almost fell backward. His sons threw themselves boldly in front of him, each one feeling for his dagger in his coat pocket. The prefect made a step toward the door, and Orso, seizing Brandolaccio by the collar, shouted:

"What have you come here for, you villain?"

"This is a trap!" cried the mayor, trying to get the door open. But, by the bandits' orders, as was afterward discovered, Saveria had locked it on the outside.

"Good people," said Brandolaccio, "don't be afraid of me. I'm not such a devil as I

look. We mean no harm at all. Signor Prefetto, I'm your very humble servant. Gently, lieutenant! you're strangling me! We're here as witnesses! Now then, Padre, speak up! Your tongue's glib enough!"

"Signor Prefetto," quoth the licentiate, "I have not the honour of being known to you. My name is Giocanto Castriconi, better known as the Padre. Aha, it's coming back to you! The signorina here, whom I have not the pleasure of knowing either, has sent to ask me to supply some information about a fellow of the name of Tomaso Bianchi, with whom I chanced to be shut up, about three weeks ago, in the prison at Bastia. This is what I have to tell you."

"Spare yourself the trouble," said the prefect. "I can not listen to anything from such a man as you. Signor della Rebbia, I am willing to believe you have had nothing to do with this detestable plot. But are you master in your own house? Will you have that door opened? Your sister may have to give an account of the strange relations in which she lives with a set of bandits."

"Signor Prefetto!" cried Colomba, "I beseech you to listen to what this man has to say! You are here to do justice to everybody,

and it is your duty to search out the truth. Speak, Giocanto Castriconi!"

"Don't listen to him," chorused the three Barricini.

"If everybody talks at once," remarked the bandit, with a smile, "nobody can contrive to hear what anybody says. Well, in the prison at Bastia I had as my companion—not as my friend—this very man, Tomaso. He received frequent visits from Signor Orlanduccio."

"You lie!" shouted the two brothers together.

"Two negatives make an affirmative," pursued Castriconi coolly. "Tomaso had money, he ate and drank of the best. I have always been fond of good cheer (that's the least of my failings), and in spite of my repugnance to rubbing shoulders with such a wretch, I let myself be tempted, several times over, into dining with him. Out of gratitude, I proposed he should escape with me. A young person—to whom I had shown some kindness—had provided me with the necessary means. I don't intend to compromise anybody. Tomaso refused my offer, telling me he was certain to be all right, as lawyer Barricini had spoken to all the judges for him, and he was sure to get out of prison

with a character as white as snow, and with money in his pocket, too. As for me, I thought it better to get into the fresh air. *Dixi.*"

"Everything that fellow has said is a heap of lies," reiterated Orlanduccio stoutly. "If we were in the open country, and each of us had his gun, he wouldn't talk in that way."

"Here's a pretty folly!" cried Brandolaccio. "Don't you quarrel with the Padre, Orlanduccio!"

"Will you be good enough to allow me to leave this room, Signor della Rebbia?" said the prefect, and he stamped his foot in his impatience.

"Saveria! Saveria!" shouted Orso, "open the door, in the devil's name!"

"One moment," said Brandolaccio. "We have to slip away first, on our side. Signor Prefetto, the custom, when people meet in the house of a mutual friend, is to allow each other half an hour's law, after departure."

The prefect cast a scornful glance at him.

"Your servant, signorina, and gentlemen all!" said Brandolaccio. Then stretching out his arm, "Hi, Brusco," he cried to his dog, "jump for the Signor Prefetto!"

The dog jumped; the bandits swiftly snatched up their arms in the kitchen, fled across

the garden, and at a shrill whistle the door of the room flew open as though by magic.

"Signor Barricini," said Orso, and suppressed fury vibrated in his voice, "I hold you to be a forger! This very day I shall charge you before the public prosecutor with forgery and complicity with Bianchi. I may perhaps have a still more terrible accusation to bring against you!"

"And I, Signor della Rebbia," replied the mayor, "shall lay my charge against you for conspiracy and complicity with bandits. Meanwhile the prefect will desire the gendarmes to keep an eye upon you."

"The prefect will do his duty," said that gentleman sternly. "He will see the public order is not disturbed at Pietranera; he will take care justice is done. I say this to you all, gentlemen!"

The mayor and Vincentello were outside the room already, and Orlanduccio was following them, stepping backward, when Orso said to him in an undertone:

"Your father is an old man. One cuff from me would kill him. It is with you and with your brother that I intend to deal."

Orlanduccio's only response was to draw his dagger and fly like a madman at Orso. But before he could use his weapon Colomba caught

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From a drawing by Gaston Vuillier.

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The mayor and Vincentello were outside the room already, and Orlanduccio was following them, stepping backward, when Orso said to him in an undertone:

"Your father is an old man. One shot from me would kill him. It is with you and with your brother that I intend to deal."

Orlanduccio's only response was to draw his dagger and fly like a maniac at Orso. But before he could use his weapon Colomba caught

hold of his arm and twisted it violently, while Orso gave him a blow in the face with his fist, which made him stagger several paces back, and come into violent collision with the door frame. Orlanduccio's dagger dropped from his hand. But Vincentello had his ready, and was rushing back into the room, when Colomba, snatching up a gun, convinced him that the struggle must be unequal. At the same moment the prefect threw himself between the combatants.

"We shall soon meet, Ors' Anton'!" shouted Orlanduccio, and slamming the door of the room violently, he turned the key in the lock, so as to insure himself time to retreat.

For a full quarter of an hour Orso and the prefect kept their places in dead silence, at opposite ends of the room. Colomba, the pride of triumph shining on her brow, gazed first at one and then at the other, as she leaned on the gun that had turned the scale of victory.

"What a country! Oh, what a country!" cried the prefect at last, rising hastily from his chair. "Signor della Rebbia, you did wrong! You must give me your word of honour to abstain from all violence, and to wait till the law settles this cursed business."

"Yes, Signor Prefetto, I was wrong to strike that villain. But I did strike him, after all, and

I can't refuse him the satisfaction he has demanded of me."

"Pooh! no! He doesn't want to fight you! But supposing he murders you? You've done everything you could to insure it."

"We'll protect ourselves," said Colomba.

"Orlanduccio," said Orso, "strikes me as being a plucky fellow, and I think better of him than that, monsieur. He was very quick about drawing his dagger. But perhaps I should have done the same thing in his place, and I'm glad my sister has not an ordinary fine lady's wrist."

"You are not to fight," exclaimed the prefect. "I forbid it!"

"Allow me to say, monsieur, that in matters that affect my honour the only authority I acknowledge is that of my own conscience."

"You sha'n't fight, I tell you!"

"You can put me under arrest, monsieur—that is, if I let you catch me. But if you were to do that, you would only delay a thing that has now become inevitable. You are a man of honour yourself, monsieur; you know there can be no other course."

"If you were to have my brother arrested," added Colomba, "half the village would take his part, and we should have a fine fusillade."

"I give you fair notice, monsieur, and I

entreat you not to think I am talking mere bravado. I warn you that if Signor Barricini abuses his authority as mayor, to have me arrested, I shall defend myself."

"From this very day," said the prefect, "Signor Barricini is suspended. I trust he will exculpate himself. Listen to me, my young gentleman, I have a liking for you. What I ask of you is nothing to speak of. Just to stay quietly at home till I get back from Corte. I shall only be three days away. I'll bring back the public prosecutor with me, and then we'll sift this wretched business to the bottom. Will you promise me you will abstain from all hostilities till then?"

"I can not promise that, monsieur, if, as I expect, Orlanduccio asks me to meet him."

"What, Signor della Rebbia! would you—a French officer—think of going out with a man you suspect of being a forger?"

"I struck him, monsieur!"

"But supposing you struck a convict, and he demanded satisfaction of you, would you fight him? Come, come, Signor Orso! But I'll ask you to do even less, do nothing to seek out Orlanduccio. I'll consent to your fighting him if he asks you for a meeting."

"He will ask for it, I haven't a doubt of

that. But I'll promise I won't give him fresh cuffs to induce him to do it."

"What a country!" cried the prefect once more, as he strode to and fro. "Shall I never get back to France?"

"Signor Prefetto," said Colomba in her most dulcet tones, "it is growing very late. Would you do us the honour of breakfasting here?"

The prefect could not help laughing.

"I've been here too long already—it may look like partiality. And there is that cursed foundation-stone. I must be off. Signorina della Rebbia! what calamities you may have prepared this day!"

"At all events, Signor Prefetto, you will do my sister the justice of believing her convictions are deeply rooted—and I am sure, now, that you yourself believe them to be well-founded."

"Farewell, sir!" said the prefect, waving his hand. "I warn you that the sergeant of gendarmes will have orders to watch everything you do."

When the prefect had departed—

"Orso," said Colomba, "this isn't the Continent. Orlanduccio knows nothing about your duels, and besides, that wretch must not die the death of a brave man."

"Colomba, my dear, you are a clever woman.

I owe you a great deal from having saved me from a hearty knife-thrust. Give me your little hand to kiss! But, hark ye, let me have my way. There are certain matters that you don't understand. Give me my breakfast. And as soon as the prefect has started off send for little Chilina, who seems to perform all the commissions she is given in the most wonderful fashion. I shall want her to take a letter for me."

While Colomba was superintending the preparation of his breakfast, Orso went up to his own room and wrote the following note:

"You must be in a hurry to meet me, and I am no less eager. We can meet at six o'clock to-morrow morning in the valley of Acquaviva. I am a skilful pistol-shot, so I do not suggest that weapon to you. I hear you are a good shot with a gun. Let us each take a double-barrelled gun. I shall be accompanied by a man from this village. If your brother wishes to go with you, take a second witness, and let me know. In that case only I should bring two with me.

"Orso Antonio della Rebbia."

After spending an hour with the deputy-mayor, and going into the Barricini house for a few minutes, the prefect, attended by a single gendarme, started for Corte. A quarter of an

hour later, Chilina carried over the letter my readers have just perused, and delivered it into Orlanduccio's own hands.

The answer was not prompt, and did not arrive till evening. It bore the signature of the elder Barricini, and informed Orso that he was laying the threatening letter sent to his son before the public prosecutor. His missive concluded thus: "Strong in the sense of a clear conscience, I patiently wait till the law has pronounced on your calumnies."

Meanwhile five or six herdsmen, summoned by Colomba, arrived to garrison the della Rebbia Tower. In spite of Orso's protests, *archere* were arranged in the windows looking onto the square, and all through the evening offers of service kept coming in from various persons belonging to the village. There was even a letter from the bandit-theologian, undertaking, for himself and Brandolaccio, that in the event of the mayor's calling on the gendarmes, they themselves would straightway intervene. The following postscript closed the letter:

"Dare I ask you what the Signor Prefetto thinks of the excellent education bestowed by my friend on Brusco, the dog? Next to Chilina, he is the most docile and promising pupil I have ever come across."

CHAPTER XVI

THE following day went by without any hostile demonstration. Both sides kept on the defensive. Orso did not leave his house, and the door of the Barricini dwelling remained closely shut. The five gendarmes who had been left to garrison Pietranera were to be seen walking about the square and the outskirts of the village, in company with the village constable, the sole representative of the urban police force. The deputy-mayor never put off his sash. But there was no actual symptom of war, except the loopholes in the two opponents' houses. Nobody but a Corsican would have noticed that the group round the evergreen oak in the middle of the square consisted solely of women.

At supper-time Colomba gleefully showed her brother a letter she had just received from Miss Nevil.

"My dear Signorina Colomba," it ran, "I learn with great pleasure, through a letter from your brother, that your enmities are all at an end. I congratulate you heartily. My father

can not endure Ajaccio now your brother is not there to talk about war and go out shooting with him. We are starting to-day, and shall sleep at the house of your kinswoman, to whom we have a letter. The day after to-morrow, somewhere about eleven o'clock, I shall come and ask you to let me taste that mountain *bruccio* of yours, which you say is so vastly superior to what we get in the town.

"Farewell, dear Signorina Colomba.

"Your affectionate

"LYDIA NEVIL."

"Then she hasn't received my second letter!" exclaimed Orso.

"You see by the date of this one that Miss Lydia must have already started when your letter reached Ajaccio. But did you tell her not to come?"

"I told her we were in a state of siege. That does not seem to me a condition that permits of our receiving company."

"Bah! These English people are so odd. The very last night I slept in her room she told me she would be sorry to leave Corsica without having seen a good *vendetta.* If you choose, Orso, you might let her see an assault on our enemies' house."

"Do you know, Colomba," said Orso, "Nature blundered when she made you a woman. You'd have made a first-rate soldier."

"Maybe. Anyhow, I'm going to make my *bruccio*."

"Don't waste your time. We must send somebody down to warn them and stop them before they start."

"Do you mean to say you would send a messenger out in such weather, to have him and your letter both swept away by a torrent? How I pity those poor bandits in this storm! Luckily they have good *piloni*.* Do you know what you ought to do, Orso? If the storm clears you should start off very early to-morrow morning, and get to our kinswoman's house before they leave it. That will be easy enough, for Miss Lydia always gets up so late. You can tell them everything that has happened here, and if they still persist in coming, why! we shall be very glad to welcome them."

Orso lost no time in assenting to this plan, and after a few moments' silence, Colomba continued:

"Perhaps, Orso, you think I was joking when I talked of an assault on the Barricini's house. Do you know we are in force—two to

* Thick cloth cloaks with hoods.

one at the very least? Now that the prefect has suspended the mayor, every man in the place is on our side. We might cut them to pieces. It would be quite easy to bring it about. If you liked, I could go over to the fountain and begin to jeer at their women folk. They would come out. Perhaps—they are such cowards!—they would fire at me through their loopholes. They wouldn't hit me. Then the thing would be done. They would have begun the attack, and the beaten party must take its chance. How is anybody to know which person's aim has been true, in a scuffle? Listen to your own sister, Orso! These lawyers who are coming will blacken lots of paper, and talk a great deal of useless stuff. Nothing will come of it all. That old fox will contrive to make them think they see stars in broad midday. Ah! if the prefect hadn't thrown himself in front of Vincentello, we should have had one less to deal with."

All this was said with the same calm air as that with which she had spoken, an instant previously, of her preparations for making the *bruccio*.

Orso, quite dumfounded, gazed at his sister with an admiration not unmixed with alarm.

"My sweet Colomba," he said, as he rose from the table, "I really am afraid you are the

very devil. But make your mind easy. If I don't succeed in getting the Barricini hanged, I'll contrive to get the better of them in some other fashion. 'Hot bullet or cold steel' *—you see I haven't forgotten my Corsican."

"The sooner the better," said Colomba, with a sigh. "What horse will you ride to-morrow, Ors' Anton'?"

"The black. Why do you ask?"

"So as to make sure he has some barley."

When Orso went up to his room, Colomba sent Saveria and the herdsmen to their beds, and sat on alone in the kitchen, where the *bruccio* was simmering. Now and then she seemed to listen, and was apparently waiting very anxiously for her brother to go to bed. At last, when she thought he was asleep, she took a knife, made sure it was sharp, slipped her little feet into thick shoes, and passed noiselessly out into the garden.

This garden, which was inclosed by walls, lay next to a good-sized piece of hedged ground, into which the horses were turned—for Corsican horses do not know what a stable means. They are generally turned loose into a field, and left to themselves, to find pasture and shelter from cold winds, as best they may.

* *Palla calda u farru freddu*, a very common saying.

Colomba opened the garden gate with the same precaution, entered the inclosure, and whistling gently, soon attracted the horses, to whom she had often brought bread and salt. As soon as the black horse came within reach, she caught him firmly by the mane, and split his ear open with her knife. The horse gave a violent leap, and tore off with that shrill cry which sharp pain occasionally extorts from his kind. Quite satisfied, Colomba was making her way back into the garden, when Orso threw open his window and shouted, "Who goes there?" At the same time she heard him cock his gun. Luckily for her the garden-door lay in the blackest shadow, and was partly screened by a large fig-tree. She very soon gathered, from the light she saw glancing up and down in her brother's room, that he was trying to light his lamp. She lost no time about closing the garden-door, and slipping along the wall, so that the outline of her black garments was lost against the dark foliage of the fruit-trees, succeeded in getting back into the kitchen a few moments before Orso entered it.

"What's the matter?" she inquired.

"I fancied I heard somebody opening the garden-door," said Orso.

"Impossible! The dog would have barked. But let us go and see!"

Orso went round the garden, and having made sure that the outer door was safely secured, he was going back to his room, rather ashamed of his false alarm.

"I am glad, brother," remarked Colomba, "that you are learning to be prudent, as a man in your position ought to be."

"You are training me well," said Orso. "Good-night!"

By dawn the next morning Orso was up and ready to start. His style of dress betrayed the desire for smartness felt by every man bound for the presence of the lady he would fain please, combined with the caution of a Corsican *in vendetta.* Over a blue coat, that sat closely to his figure, he wore a small tin case full of cartridges, slung across his shoulder by a green silk cord. His dagger lay in his side pocket, and in his hand he carried his handsome Manton, ready loaded. While he was hastily swallowing the cup of coffee Colomba had poured out for him, one of the herdsmen went out to put the bridle and saddle on the black horse. Orso and his sister followed close on his heels and entered the field. The man had caught the horse, but he had dropped both saddle and bridle, and seemed quite paralyzed with horror, while the horse, remembering the wound it had received during the

night, and trembling for its other ear, was rearing, kicking, and neighing like twenty fiends.

"Now then! make haste!" shouted Orso.

"Ho, Ors' Anton'! Ho, Ors' Anton'!" yelled the herdsman. "Holy Madonna!" and he poured out a string of imprecations, numberless, endless, and most of them quite untranslatable.

"What can be the matter?" inquired Colomba. They all drew near to the horse, and at the sight of the creature's bleeding head and split ear there was a general outcry of surprise and indignation. My readers must know that among the Corsicans to mutilate an enemy's horse is at once a vengeance, a challenge, and a mortal threat. "Nothing but a bullet-wound can expiate such a crime."

Though Orso, having lived so long on the mainland, was not so sensitive as other Corsicans to the enormity of the insult, still, if any supporter of the Barricini had appeared in his sight at that moment, he would probably have taken instant vengeance on him for the outrage he ascribed to his enemies.

"The cowardly wretches!" he cried. "To avenge themselves on a poor brute, when they dare not meet me face to face!"

"What are we waiting for?" exclaimed Co-

lomba vehemently. "They come here and brave us! they mutilate our horses! and we are not to make any response? Are you men?"

"Vengeance!" shouted the herdsmen. "Let us lead the horse through the village, and attack their house!"

"There's a thatched barn that touches their Tower," said old Polo Griffo; "I'd set fire to it in a trice."

Another man wanted to fetch the ladders out of the church steeple. A third proposed they should break in the doors of the house with a heavy beam intended for some house in course of building, which had been left lying in the square. Amid all the angry voices Colomba was heard telling her satellites that before they went to work she would give each man of them a large glass of anisette.

Unluckily, or rather luckily, the impression she had expected to produce by her own cruel treatment of the poor horse was largely lost on Orso. He felt no doubt that the savage mutilation was due to one of his foes, and he specially suspected Orlanduccio; but he did not believe that the young man, whom he himself had provoked and struck, had wiped out his shame by slitting a horse's ear. On the contrary, this mean and ridiculous piece of vengeance had increased

Orso's scorn for his opponents, and he now felt, with the prefect, that such people were not worthy to try conclusions with himself. As soon as he was able to make himself heard, he informed his astonished partisans that they would have to relinquish all their bellicose intentions, and that the power of the law, which would shortly be on the spot, would amply suffice to avenge the hurt done to a horse's ear.

"I'm master here!" he added sternly; "and I insist on being obeyed. The first man who dares to say anything more about killing or burning, will quite possibly get a scorching at my hands! Be off! Saddle me the gray horse!"

"What's this, Orso?" said Colomba, drawing him apart. "You allow these people to insult us? No Barricini would have dared to mutilate any beast of ours in my father's time."

"I promise you they shall have reason to repent it. But it is gendarme's and jailer's work to punish wretches who only venture to raise their hands against brute beasts. I've told you already, the law will punish them; and if not, you will not need to remind me whose son I am."

"Patience!" answered Colomba, with a sigh.

"Remember this, sister," continued Orso; "if I find, when I come back, that any demonstration whatever has been made against the

Barricini I shall never forgive you." Then, in a gentler tone, he added, "Very possibly—very probably—I shall bring the colonel and his daughter back with me. See that their rooms are well prepared, and that the breakfast is good. In fact, let us make our guests as comfortable as we can. It's a very good thing to be brave, Colomba, but a woman must know how to manage her household, as well. Come, kiss me, and be good! Here's the gray, ready saddled."

"Orso," said Colomba, "you mustn't go alone."

"I don't need anybody," replied Orso; "and I'll promise you nobody shall slit my ear."

"Oh, I'll never consent to your going alone, while there is a feud. Here! Polo Griffo! Gian' Franco! Memmo! take your guns; you must go with my brother."

After a somewhat lively argument, Orso had to give in, and accept an escort. From the most excited of the herdsmen he chose out those who had been loudest in their desire to commence hostilities; then, after laying fresh injunctions on his sister and the men he was leaving behind, he started, making a detour, this time, so as to avoid the Barricinis' dwelling.

They were a long way from Pietranera, and were travelling along at a great pace, when, as

they crossed a streamlet that ran into a marsh, Polo Griffo noticed several porkers wallowing comfortably in the mud, in full enjoyment at once of the warmth of the sun and the coolness of the water. Instantly he took aim at the biggest, fired at its head, and shot it dead. The dead creature's comrades rose and fled with astonishing swiftness, and though another herdsman fired at them, they reached a thicket and disappeared into it, safe and sound.

"Idiots!" cried Orso. "You've been taking pigs for wild boars!"

"Not a bit, Ors' Anton'," replied Polo Griffo. "But that herd belongs to the lawyer, and I've taught him, now, to mutilate our horses."

"What! you rascal!" shouted Orso, in a perfect fury. "You ape the vile behaviour of our enemies! Be off, villains! I don't want you! You're only fit to fight with pigs. I swear to God that if you dare follow me I'll blow your brains out!"

The herdsmen stared at each other, struck quite dumb. Orso spurred his horse, galloped off, and was soon out of sight.

"Well, well!" said Polo Griffo. "Here's a pretty thing. You devote yourself to people, and then this is how they treat you. His father,

the colonel, was angry with you long ago, because you levelled your gun at the lawyer. Great idiot you were, not to shoot. And now here is his son. You saw what I did for him. And he talks about cracking my skull, just as he would crack a gourd that lets the wine leak out. That's what people learn on the mainland, Memmo!"

"Yes, and if any one finds out it was you who killed that pig there'll be a suit against you, and Ors' Anton' won't speak to the judges, nor buy off the lawyer for you. Luckily nobody saw, and you have Saint Nega to help you out."

After a hasty conclave, the two herdsmen concluded their wisest plan was to throw the dead pig into a bog, and this project they carefully executed, after each had duly carved himself several slices out of the body of this innocent victim of the feud between the Barricini and the della Rebbia.

CHAPTER XVII

ONCE rid of his unruly escort, Orso proceeded calmly on his way, far more absorbed by the prospective pleasure of seeing Miss Nevil than stirred by any fear of coming across his enemies.

"The lawsuit I must bring against these Barricini villains," he mused, "will necessitate my going down to Bastia. Why should I not go there with Miss Nevil? And once at Bastia, why shouldn't we all go together to the springs of Orezza?"

Suddenly his childish recollections of that picturesque spot rose up before him. He fancied himself on the verdant lawn that spreads beneath the ancient chestnut-trees. On the lustrous green sward, studded with blue flowers like eyes that smiled upon him, he saw Miss Lydia seated at his side. She had taken off her hat, and her fair hair, softer and finer than any silk, shone like gold in the sunlight that glinted through the foliage. Her clear blue eyes looked to him bluer than the sky itself. With her cheek resting on

one hand, she was listening thoughtfully to the words of love he poured tremblingly into her ear. She wore the muslin gown in which she had been dressed that last day at Ajaccio. From beneath its folds peeped out a tiny foot, shod with black satin. Orso told himself that he would be happy indeed if he might dare to kiss that little foot—but one of Miss Lydia's hands was bare and held a daisy. He took the daisy from her, and Lydia's hand pressed his, and then he kissed the daisy, and then he kissed her hand, and yet she did not chide him. . . . And all these thoughts prevented him from paying any attention to the road he was travelling, and meanwhile he trotted steadily onward. For the second time, in his fancy, he was about to kiss Miss Nevil's snow-white hand, when, as his horse stopped short, he very nearly kissed its head, in stern reality. Little Chilina had barred his way, and seized his bridle.

"Where are you going to, Ors' Anton'?" she said. "Don't you know your enemy is close by?"

"My enemy!" cried Orso, furious at being interrupted at such a delightful moment. "Where is he?"

"Orlanduccio is close by, he's waiting for you! Go back, go back!"

"Ho! ho! So he's waiting for me! Did you see him?"

"Yes, Ors' Anton'! I was lying down in the heather when he passed by. He was looking round everywhere through his glass."

"And which way did he go?"

"He went down there. Just where you were going!"

"Thank you!"

"Ors' Anton', hadn't you better wait for my uncle? He must be here soon—and with him you would be safe."

"Don't be frightened, Chili. I don't need your uncle."

"If you would let me, I would go in front of you."

"No, thanks! no, thanks!"

And Orso, spurring his horse, rode rapidly in the direction to which the little girl had pointed.

His first impulse had been one of blind fury, and he had told himself that fortune was offering him an excellent opportunity of punishing the coward who had avenged the blow he had received by mutilating a horse. But as he moved onward the thought of his promise to the prefect, and, above all, his fear of missing Miss Nevil's visit, altered his feelings, and made him almost wish he might not come upon Orlanduccio. Soon,

however, the memory of his father, the indignity offered to his own horse, and the threats of the Barricini, stirred his rage afresh, and incited him to seek his foe, and to provoke and force him to a fight. Thus tossed by conflicting feelings, he continued his progress, though now he carefully scrutinized every thicket and hedge, and sometimes even pulled up his horse to listen to the vague sounds to be heard in any open country. Ten minutes after he had left little Chilina (it was then about nine o'clock in the morning) he found himself on the edge of an exceedingly steep declivity. The road, or rather the very slight path, which he was following, ran through a *mâquis* that had been lately burned. The ground was covered with whitish ashes, and here and there some shrubs, and a few big trees, blackened by the flames, and entirely stripped of their leaves, still stood erect—though life had long since departed out of them. The sight of a burned *mâquis* is enough to make a man fancy he has been transported into midwinter in some northern clime, and the contrast between the barrenness of the ground over which the flames have passed, with the luxuriant vegetation round about it, heightens this appearance of sadness and desolation. But at that moment the only thing that struck

Orso in this particular landscape was one point —an important one, it is true, in his present circumstances. The bareness of the ground rendered any kind of ambush impossible, and the man who has reason to fear that at any moment he may see a gun-barrel thrust out of a thicket straight at his own chest, looks on a stretch of smooth ground, with nothing on it to intercept his view, as a kind of oasis. After this burned *mâquis* came a number of cultivated fields, inclosed, according to the fashion of that country, with breast-high walls, built of dry stones. The path ran between these fields, which were irregularly dotted with huge chestnut-trees, producing, from a distance, the effect of a thick wood.

The steepness of the declivity made it necessary for Orso to dismount. He was walking quickly down the hill, which was slippery with ashes (he had thrown the bridle on his horse's neck), and was hardly five-and-twenty paces from one of these stone fences, when, just in front of him, on the right-hand side of the road, he perceived first of all the barrel of a gun, and then a head, rising over the top of the wall. The gun was levelled, and he recognised Orlanduccio, just ready to fire. Orso swiftly prepared for self-defence, and the two men, taking deliberate aim, stared at each other for several seconds,

with that thrill of emotion which the bravest must feel when he knows he must either deal death or endure it.

"Vile coward!" shouted Orso.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when he saw the flash of Orlanduccio's gun, and almost at the same instant a second shot rang out on his left from the other side of the path, fired by a man whom he had not noticed, and who was aiming at him from behind another wall. Both bullets struck him. The first, Orlanduccio's, passed through his left arm, which Orso had turned toward him as he aimed. The second shot struck him in the chest, and tore his coat, but coming in contact with the blade of his dagger, it luckily flattened against it, and only inflicted a trifling bruise. Orso's left arm fell helpless at his side, and the barrel of his gun dropped for a moment, but he raised it at once, and aiming his weapon with his right hand only, he fired at Orlanduccio. His enemy's head, which was only exposed to the level of the eyes, disappeared behind the wall. Then Orso, swinging round to the left, fired the second barrel at a man in a cloud of smoke whom he could hardly see. This face likewise disappeared. The four shots had followed each other with incredible swiftness; no trained soldiers ever fired their

volleys in quicker succession. After Orso's last shot a great silence fell. The smoke from his weapon rose slowly up into the sky. There was not a movement, not the slightest sound from behind the wall. But for the pain in his arm, he could have fancied the men on whom he had just fired had been phantoms of his own imagination.

Fully expecting a second volley, Orso moved a few steps, to place himself behind one of the burned trees that still stood upright in the *mâquis*. Thus sheltered, he put his gun between his knees, and hurriedly reloaded it. Meanwhile his left arm began to hurt him horribly, and felt as if it were being dragged down by a huge weight.

What had become of his adversaries? He could not understand. If they had taken to flight, if they had been wounded, he would certainly have heard some noise, some stir among the leaves. Were they dead, then? Or, what was far more likely, were they not waiting behind their wall for a chance of shooting at him again? In his uncertainty, and feeling his strength fast failing him, he knelt down on his right knee, rested his wounded arm upon the other, and took advantage of a branch that protruded from the trunk of the burned tree to

support his gun. With his finger on the trigger, his eye fixed on the wall, and his ear strained to catch the slightest sound, he knelt there, motionless, for several minutes, which seemed to him a century. At last, behind him, in the far distance, he heard a faint shout, and very soon a dog flew like an arrow down the slope, and stopped short, close to him, wagging its tail. It was Brusco, the comrade and follower of the bandits—the herald, doubtless, of his master's approach. Never was any honest man more impatiently awaited. With his muzzle in the air, and turned toward the nearest fence, the dog sniffed anxiously. Suddenly he gave vent to a low growl, sprang at a bound over the wall, and almost instantly reappeared upon its crest, whence he gazed steadily at Orso with eyes that spoke surprise as clearly as a dog's may do it. Then he sniffed again, this time toward the other inclosure, the wall of which he also crossed. Within a second he was back on the top of that, with the same air of astonishment and alarm, and straightway he bounded into the thicket with his tail between his legs, still gazing at Orso, and retiring from him slowly, and sideways, until he had put some distance between them. Then off he started again, tearing up the slope almost as fast as he had come down it,

to meet a man, who, in spite of its steepness, was rapidly descending.

"Help, Brando!" shouted Orso, as soon as he thought he was within hearing.

"Hallo! Ors' Anton'! are you wounded?" inquired Brandolaccio, as he ran up panting. "Is it in your body or your limbs?"

"In the arm."

"The arm—oh, that's nothing! And the other fellow?"

"I think I hit him."

Brandolaccio ran after his dog to the nearest field and leaned over to look at the other side of the wall, then pulling off his cap—

"Signor Orlanduccio, I salute you!" said he, then turning toward Orso, he bowed to him, also, gravely.

"That," he remarked, "is what I call a man who has been properly done for."

"Is he still alive?" asked Orso, who could hardly breathe.

"Oh! he wouldn't wish it! he'd be too much vexed about the bullet you put into his eye! Holy Madonna! What a hole! That's a good gun, upon my soul! what a weight! That spatters a man's brains for you! Hark ye, Ors' Anton'! when I heard the first *piff, piff,* says I to myself: 'Dash it, they're murdering my

lieutenant!' Then I heard *boum, boum.* 'Ha, ha!' says I, 'that's the English gun beginning to talk—he's firing back.' But what on earth do you want with me, Brusco?"

The dog guided him to the other field.

"Upon my word," cried Brandolaccio, utterly astonished, "a right and left, that's what it is! Deuce take it! Clear enough, powder must be dear, for you don't waste it!"

"What do you mean, for God's sake?" asked Orso.

"Come, sir, don't try to humbug me; you bring down the game, and then you want somebody to pick it up for you. Well! there's one man who'll have a queer dessert to-day, and that's Lawyer Barricini!—you want butcher's meat, do you? Well, here you have it. Now, who the devil will be the heir?"

"What! is Vincentello dead too?"

"Dead as mutton. *Salute à noi!* * The good point about you is that you don't let them suffer. Just come over and look at Vincentello; he's kneeling here with his head against the wall, as if he were asleep. You may say he sleeps like lead, this time, poor devil."

Orso turned away his head in horror.

* An exclamation generally used after the word "death" and which is supposed to serve as its corrective.

"Are you certain he's dead?"

"You're like Sampiero Corso, who never had to fire more than once. Look at it there, in his chest, on the left—just where Vincileone was hit at Waterloo. I'll wager that bullet isn't far from his heart—a right and left! Ah! I'll never talk about shooting again. Two with two shots, and bullets at that! The two brothers! If he'd had a third shot he'd have killed their papa. Better luck next time. What a shot! Ors' Anton'! And to think that an honest poor chap like me will never get the chance of a right and left at two gendarmes!"

As he talked the bandit was scanning Orso's arm, and splitting up his sleeve with his dagger.

"This is nothing," said he. "But this coat of yours will give Signorina Colomba work to do. Ha! what's this I see? this gash upon your chest? Nothing went in there, surely? No! you wouldn't be so brisk as you are! Come, try to move your finger. Do you feel my teeth when I bite your little finger? Not very well? Never mind! it won't be much. Let me take your handkerchief and your neckcloth. Well, your coat's spoilt, anyhow! What the devil did you make yourself so smart for? Were you going to a wedding? There! drink a drop of wine. Why

on earth don't you carry a flask? Does any Corsican ever go out without a flask?"

Then again he broke off the dressing of the wound to exclaim:

"A right and left! Both of them stone dead! How the Padre will laugh! A right and left! Oh, here's that little dawdle Chilina at last!"

Orso made no reply—he was as pale as death and shaking in every limb.

"Chili!" shouted Brandolaccio, "go and look behind that wall!"

The child, using both hands and feet, scrambled onto the wall, and the moment she caught sight of Orlanduccio's corpse she crossed herself.

"That's nothing," proceeded the bandit; "go and look farther on, over there!"

The child crossed herself again.

"Was it you, uncle?" she asked timidly.

"Me! Don't you know I've turned into a useless old fellow! This, Chili, is the signor's work; offer him your compliments."

"The signora will be greatly rejoiced," said Chilina, "and she will be very much grieved to know you are wounded, Ors' Anton'."

"Now then, Ors' Anton'," said the bandit, when he had finished binding up the wound. "Chilina, here, has caught your horse. You must get on his back, and come with me to the

Stazzona *mâquis*. It would be a sly fellow who'd lay his hand on you there. When we get to the Cross of Santa Christina, you'll have to dismount. You'll give over your horse to Chilina, who'll go off and warn the signorina. You can give her your messages now, as you ride along. You can say anything to the child, Ors' Anton'. She would let herself be cut in pieces rather than betray her friends," and then, fondly, he turned to the little girl, " That's it, you little hussy; a ban on you, a curse on you—you jade! " For Brandolaccio, who was superstitious, like most bandits, feared he might cast a spell on a child if he blessed it or praised it, seeing it is a well-known fact that the mysterious powers that rule the *Annocchiatura* * have a vile habit of fulfilling our wishes in the very opposite sense to that we give them.

" Where am I to go, Brando? " queried Orso in a faint voice.

" Faith! you must choose; either to jail or to the *mâquis*. But no della Rebbia knows the path that leads him to the jail. To the *mâquis*, Ors' Anton'."

" Farewell, then, to all my hopes! " exclaimed the wounded man, sadly.

* *Annocchiatura*, an involuntary spell cast either by the eye or by spoken words.

"Your hopes? Deuce take it! Did you hope to do any better with a double-barrelled gun? How on earth did the fellows contrive to hit you? The rascals must have been as hard to kill as cats."

"They fired first," said Orso.

"True, true; I'd forgotten that!—*piff, piff —boum, boum!* A right and left, and only one hand! * If any man can do better, I'll go hang myself. Come! now you're safely mounted! Before we start, just give a glance at your work. It isn't civil to leave one's company without saying good-bye."

Orso spurred his horse. He would not have looked at the two poor wretches he had just destroyed, for anything on earth.

"Hark ye, Ors' Anton'," quoth the bandit, as he caught hold of the horse's bridle, "shall I tell you the truth? Well, no offence to you! I'm sorry for those poor young fellows! You'll pardon me, I hope; so good-looking, so strong, so young. Orlanduccio, I've shot with him so often! Only four days ago he gave me a bundle of cigars, and Vincentello—he was always so cheery.

* If any unbelieving sportsman is inclined to doubt the possibility of Signor della Rebbia's right and left shot, I would suggest his betaking himself to Sartena, and there hearing how one of the foremost and most agreeable residents in that town saved himself unaided and with one arm broken, in at least equally dangerous circumstances.

Of course you've only done what you had to do, and indeed the shot was such a splendid one, nobody could regret it. But I, you see, had nothing to do with your vengeance. I know you're perfectly in the right. When one has an enemy one must get rid of him. But the Barricini were an old family. Here's another of them wiped out, and by a right and left too! It's striking."

As he thus spoke his funeral oration over the Barricini, Brandolaccio hastily guided Orso, Chilina, and Brusco, the dog, toward the Stazzona *mâquis.*

CHAPTER XVIII

MEANWHILE, very shortly after Orso's departure, Colomba's spies had warned her that the Barricini were out on the warpath, and from that moment she was racked by the most intense anxiety. She was to be seen moving hither and thither all over the house, between the kitchen and the rooms that were being made ready for her guests, doing nothing, yet always busy, and constantly stopping to look out of a window for any unusual stir in the village. Toward eleven o'clock, a somewhat numerous cavalcade rode into Pietranera. This was the colonel, with his daughter, their servants, and their guide. Colomba's first word, as she welcomed them, was "Have you seen my brother?" Then she questioned the guide as to the road they had taken, and the hour of their departure, and having heard his answers, she could not understand why they had not met him.

"Perhaps," said the guide, "your brother took the higher path; we came by the lower one."

But Colomba only shook her head and asked more questions. In spite of her natural firmness of character, increased as it was by her proud desire to conceal any sign of weakness before strangers, she could not hide her anxiety, and as soon as she had informed them of the attempted reconciliation, and of its unfortunate issue, this was shared by the colonel and Miss Lydia. Miss Nevil became very uneasy, and wanted to have messengers sent off in every direction, and her father offered to remount at once and set out with the guide in search of Orso. Her guests' alarm recalled Colomba to a sense of her duties as a hostess. She strove to force a smile as she pressed the colonel to come to table, and suggested twenty plausible reasons, which she herself demolished within an instant, to account for her brother's delay. The colonel, feeling it to be his duty, as a man, to reassure the ladies, put forward his own explanation.

"I'll wager," he said, "that della Rebbia has come across some game or other. He has not been able to stand out against that temptation, and we shall soon see him come in with a heavy bag. 'Pon my soul," he went on, "we did hear four shots fired on the road. Two of them were louder than the others, and I said to my girl, 'I'll bet anything that's della Rebbia out shoot-

ing! My gun is the only one that would make that noise.' "

Colomba turned pale, and Lydia, who was watching her closely, had no difficulty in guessing the suspicions with which the colonel's conjecture had inspired her. After a few minutes' silence, Colomba eagerly inquired whether the two louder reports had been heard before or after the others. But neither the colonel, his daughter, nor the guide had paid much attention to this all-important detail.

Toward one o'clock, as none of Colomba's messengers had yet returned, she gathered all her courage, and insisted that her guests should sit down to table with her. But, except the colonel, none of them could eat. At the slightest sound in the square, Colomba ran to the window. Then drearily she returned to her place, and struggled yet more drearily to carry on a trivial conversation, to which nobody paid the slightest attention, and which was broken by long intervals of silence. All at once they heard a horse's gallop.

"Ah! That must be my brother at last!" said Colomba, rising from her chair. But when she saw Chilina astride on Orso's horse—"My brother is dead!" she cried, in a heart-rending voice.

The colonel dropped his glass. Miss Lydia screamed. They all rushed to the door of the house. Before Chilina could jump off her steed, she was snatched up like a feather by Colomba, who held her so tight that she almost choked her. The child understood her agonized look, and her first words were those of the chorus in Othello: "He lives!" Colomba's grasp relaxed, and nimbly as a kitten Chilina dropped upon the ground.

"The others?" queried Colomba hoarsely. Chilina crossed herself with her first and middle finger. A deep flush instantly replaced the deadly pallor of Colomba's face. She cast one fierce look at the Barricini dwelling, and then, with a smile, she turned to her guests.

"Let us go in and drink our coffee," she said.

The story the bandit's Iris had to tell was a long one. Her narrative, translated literally into Italian by Colomba, and then into English by Miss Nevil, wrung more than one oath from the colonel, more than one sigh from the fair Lydia. But Colomba heard it all unmoved. Only she twisted her damask napkin till it seemed as if she must tear it in pieces. She interrupted the child, five or six times over, to make her repeat again that Brandolaccio had said the wound was not dangerous, and that he had seen

many worse. When she had finished her tale, Chilina announced that Orso earnestly begged he might be sent writing materials, and that he desired his sister would beseech a lady who might be staying in his house not to depart from it, until she had received a letter from him.

"That is what was worrying him most," the child added; "and even after I had started he called me back, to bid me not forget the message. It was the third time he had given it to me." When Colomba heard of her brother's injunction she smiled faintly, and squeezed the fair Englishwoman's hand. That young lady burst into tears, and did not seem to think it advisable to translate that particular part of the story to her father.

"Yes, my dear," cried Colomba, kissing Miss Nevil. "You shall stay with me, and you shall help us."

Then, taking a pile of old linen out of a cupboard, she began to cut it up, to make lint and bandages. Any one who saw her flashing eyes, her heightened colour, her alternate fits of anxiety and composure, would have found it hard to say whether distress at her brother's wound, or delight at the extinction of her foes, were most affecting her. One moment she was pouring out the colonel's coffee, and telling him

how well she made it, the next she was setting Miss Lydia and Chilina to work, exhorting them to sew bandages, and roll them up. Then, for the twentieth time, she would ask whether Orso's wound was very painful. She constantly broke off her own work to exclaim to the colonel:

"Two such cunning men, such dangerous fellows! and he alone, wounded, with only one arm! He killed the two of them! What courage, colonel! Isn't he a hero? Ah, Miss Nevil! how good it must be to live in a peaceful country like yours! I'm sure you did not really know my brother till now! I said it—'The falcon will spread his wings!' You were deceived by his gentle look! That's because with you, Miss Nevil——Ah! if he could see you working for him now! My poor Orso!"

Miss Lydia was doing hardly any work, and could not find a single word to say. Her father kept asking why nobody went to lay a complaint before a magistrate. He talked about a coroner's inquest, and all sorts of other proceedings quite unknown to Corsican economy. And then he begged to be told whether the country house owned by that worthy Signor Brandolaccio, who had brought succour to the wounded man, was very far away from Pietranera, and whether he could not go there himself, to see his friend.

And Colomba replied, with her usual composure, that Orso was in the *mâquis;* that he was being taken care of by a bandit; that it would be a great risk for him to show himself until he was sure of the line the prefect and the judges were likely to take; and, finally, that she would manage to have him secretly attended by a skilful surgeon.

"Above all things, colonel," she added, "remember that you heard the four shots, and that you told me Orso fired last."

The colonel could make neither head nor tail of the business, and his daughter did nothing but heave sighs and dry her eyes.

The day was far advanced, when a gloomy procession wended its way into the village. The bodies of his two sons were brought home to Lawyer Barricini, each corpse thrown across a mule, which was led by a peasant. A crowd of dependents and idlers folowed the dreary *cortège.* With it appeared the gendarmes, who always came in too late, and the deputy-mayor, throwing up his hands, and incessantly repeating, "What will the Signor Prefetto say!" Some of the women, among them Orlanduccio's foster-mother, were tearing their hair and shrieking wildly. But their clamorous grief was less impressive than the dumb despair of one man,

on whom all eyes were fixed. This was the wretched father, who passed from one corpse to the other, lifting up the earth-soiled heads, kissing the blackened lips, supporting the limbs that were stiff already, as if he would save them from the jolting of the road. Now and then he opened his mouth as though about to speak, but not a cry came, not a word. His eyes never left the dead bodies, and as he walked, he knocked himself against the stones, against the trees, against every obstacle that chanced to lie in his path.

The women's lamentations grew louder, and the men's curses deeper, when Orso's house appeared in sight. When some shepherds of the della Rebbia party ventured on a triumphant shout, their enemy's indignation became ungovernable. "Vengeance! Vengeance!" exclaimed several voices. Stones were thrown, and two shots, fired at the windows of the room in which Colomba and her guests were sitting, pierced the outside shutters, and carried splinters of wood on to the table at which the two ladies were working. Miss Lydia screamed violently, the colonel snatched up a gun, and Colomba, before he could stop her, rushed to the door of the house and threw it violently open. There, standing high on the threshold, with her two hands outstretched to curse her enemies:

"Cowards!" she cried. "You fire on women and on foreigners! Are you Corsicans? Are you men? Wretches, who can only murder a man from behind. Come on! I defy you! I am alone! My brother is far away! Come! kill me, kill my guests! It would be worthy of you! . . . But you dare not, cowards that you are! You know we avenge our wrongs! Away with you! Go, weep like women, and be thankful we do not ask you for more blood!"

There was something terrible and imposing in Colomba's voice and mien. At the sight of her the crowd recoiled as though it beheld one of those evil fairies of which so many tales are told on long winter evenings, in Corsica. The deputy-mayor, the gendarmes, and a few women seized the opportunity, and threw themselves between the two factions; for the della Rebbia herdsmen were already loading their guns, and for a moment a general fight in the middle of the square had appeared imminent. But the two parties were both leaderless, and Corsicans, whose rage is always subject to discipline, seldom come to blows unless the chief authors of their internecine quarrels are present. Besides, Colomba, who had learned prudence from victory, restrained her little garrison.

"Let the poor folks weep in peace," she said.

"Let the old man carry his own flesh home. What is the good of killing an old fox who has no teeth left to bite with, . . . Giudice Barricini! Remember the 2d of August! Remember the blood-stained pocket-book in which you wrote with your forger's hand! My father had written down your debt! Your sons have paid it. You may go free, old Barricini!"

With folded arms and a scornful smile upon her lips, Colomba watched the bearers carry the corpses of her enemies into their home, and the crowd without it melt gradually away. Then she closed her own door, and, going back into the dining-room, she said to the colonel:

"I beg, sir, you will forgive my fellow-countrymen! I never could have believed that any Corsican would have fired on a house that sheltered strangers, and I am ashamed of my country."

That night, when Miss Lydia had gone up to her room, the colonel followed her, and inquired whether they had not better get out of a village where they ran incessant risk of having a bullet through their heads, the very next morning, and leave this country, seething with treachery and murder, as soon as possible.

Miss Nevil did not answer for some time, and

her father's suggestion evidently caused her considerable perplexity. At last she said:

"How can we leave this poor young creature, just when she is so much in need of consolation? Don't you think that would be cruel, father?"

"I only spoke on your account, child," said the colonel. "And I assure you that if I once felt you were safe in the hotel at Ajaccio, I should be very sorry to leave this cursed island myself, without shaking that plucky fellow della Rebbia's hand again."

"Well then, father, let us wait a while, and before we start let us make quite sure we can not be of any use to them."

"Kind soul!" said the colonel, as he kissed his daughter's forehead. "It is a pleasure to see you sacrifice yourself for the sake of softening other people's suffering. Let us stay on. We shall never have to repent having done right."

Miss Lydia tossed sleeplessly to and fro in her bed. Sometimes she took the vague night sounds for preparations for an attack on the house. Sometimes, less alarmed on her own account, she thought of poor, wounded Orso, who was probably lying on the cold earth, with no help beyond what he might expect from a bandit's charity. She fancied him covered with

blood, and writhing in hideous suffering; and the extraordinary thing was that whenever Orso's image rose up before her mind's eye, she always beheld him as she had seen him when he rode away, pressing the talisman she had bestowed upon him to his lips. Then she mused over his courage. She told herself he had exposed himself to the frightful danger he had just escaped on her account, just for the sake of seeing her a little sooner. A very little more, and she would have persuaded herself that Orso had earned his broken arm in her defence! She reproached herself with being the cause of his wound. But she admired him for it all the more, and if that celebrated right and left was not so splendid a feat in her sight as in Brandolaccio's or Colomba's, still she was convinced few heroes of romance could ever have behaved with such intrepidity and coolness, in so dangerous a pinch.

Her room was that usually occupied by Colomba. Above a kind of oaken *prie-dieu,* and beside a sprig of blessed palm, a little miniature of Orso, in his sub-lieutenant's uniform, hung on the wall. Miss Nevil took the portrait down, looked at it for a long time, and laid it at last on the table by her bed, instead of hanging it up again in its place. She did not fall asleep till daybreak, and when she woke the sun had

travelled high above the horizon. In front of her bed she beheld Colomba, waiting, motionless, till she should open her eyes.

"Well, dear lady, are you not very uncomfortable in this poor house of ours?" said Colomba to her. "I fear you have hardly slept at all."

"Have you any news, dear friend?" cried Miss Nevil, sitting up in bed.

Her eye fell on Orso's picture, and she hastily tossed her handkerchief upon it.

"Yes, I have news," said Colomba, with a smile.

Then she took up the picture.

"Do you think it like him? He is better looking than that!"

"Really," stammered Miss Nevil, quite confused, "I took down that picture in a fit of absence! I have a horrid habit of touching everything and never putting anything back! How is your brother?"

"Fairly well. Giocanto came here before four o'clock this morning. He brought me a letter for you, Miss Lydia. Orso hasn't written anything to me! It is addressed to Colomba, indeed, but underneath that he has written 'For Miss N.' But sisters are never jealous! Giocanto says it hurt him dreadfully to write. Gio-

canto, who writes a splendid hand, offered to do it at his dictation. But he would not let him. He wrote it with a pencil, lying on his back. Brandolaccio held the paper for him. My brother kept trying to raise himself, and then the very slightest movement gave him the most dreadful agony in his arm. Giocanto says it was pitiful. Here is his letter."

Miss Nevil read the letter, which, as an extra precaution, no doubt, was written in English. Its contents were as follows:

"MADEMOISELLE: An unhappy fate has driven me on. I know not what my enemies will say, what slanders they will invent. I care little, so long as you, mademoiselle, give them no credence! Ever since I first saw you I have been nursing wild dreams. I needed this catastrophe to show me my own folly.

"I have come back to my senses now. I know the future that lies before me, and I shall face it with resignation. I dare not keep this ring you gave me, and which I believed to be a lucky talisman. I fear, Miss Nevil, you may regret your gift has been so ill-bestowed. Or rather, I fear it may remind me of the days of my own madness. Colomba will give it to you. Farewell, mademoiselle! You are about to leave

Corsica, and I shall never see you again. But tell my sister, at least, that I still possess your esteem—and I tell you, confidently, that I am still worthy of it.

"O. D. R."

Miss Lydia had turned away while she read the letter, and Colomba, who was watching her closely, gave her the Egyptian ring, with an inquiring glance as to what it all meant. But Miss Lydia dared not raise her head, and looked dejectedly at the ring, alternately putting it on her finger and pulling it off again.

"Dear Miss Nevil," said Colomba, "may I not know what my brother says to you? Does he say anything about his health?"

"Indeed," said Miss Lydia, colouring, "he doesn't mention it. His letter is in English. He desires me to tell my father— He hopes the prefect will be able to arrange——"

With a mischievous smile, Colomba sat down on the bed, took hold of both Miss Nevil's hands, and, looking at her with her piercing eyes—

"Will you be kind?" she said. "Won't you answer my brother's letter? You would do him so much good! For a moment I thought of waking you when his letter came, and then I didn't dare!"

"You did very wrong," replied Miss Nevil. "If a word from me could——"

"I can't send him any letter now. The prefect has arrived, and Pietranera is full of his policemen. Later on, we'll see what we can do. Oh, Miss Nevil, if you only knew my brother, you would love him as dearly as I do. He's so good! He's so brave! Just think of what he has done! One man against two, and wounded as well!"

The prefect had returned. Warned by an express messenger sent by the deputy-mayor, he had brought over the public prosecutor, the registrar, and all their myrmidons, to investigate the fresh and terrible catastrophe which had just complicated, or it may be ended, the warfare between the chief families of Pietranera. Shortly after his arrival, he saw the colonel and his daughter, and did not conceal his fear that the business might take on an ugly aspect.

"You know," he said, "that the fight took place without witnesses, and the reputation of these two unhappy young men stood so high, both for bravery and cunning, that nobody will believe Signor della Rebbia can have killed them without the help of the bandits with whom he is now supposed to have taken refuge."

" It's not possible," said the colonel. " Orso della Rebbia is a most honourable fellow. I'll stake my life on that."

" I believe you," said the prefect. " But the public prosecutor (those gentry always are suspicious) does not strike me as being particularly well disposed toward him. He holds one bit of evidence which goes rather against our friend—a threatening letter to Orlanduccio, in which he suggests a meeting, and is inclined to think that meeting was a trap."

" That fellow Orlanduccio refused to fight it out like a gentleman."

" That is not the custom here. In this country, people lie in ambush, and kill each other from behind. There is one deposition in his favour—that of a child, who declares she heard four reports, two of which were louder than the others, and produced by a heavy weapon, such as Signor della Rebbia's gun. Unluckily, the child is the niece of one of the bandits suspected of being his accomplices, and has probably been taught her lesson."

" Sir," broke in Miss Lydia, reddening to the roots of her hair, " we were on the road when those shots were fired, and we heard the same thing."

" Really? That's most important! And you,

colonel, no doubt you remarked the very same thing?"

"Yes," responded Miss Lydia quickly. "It was my father, who is so accustomed to firearms, who said to me, 'There's Signor della Rebbia shooting with my gun!'"

"And you are sure those shots you recognised were the last?"

"The two last, weren't they, papa?"

Memory was not the colonel's strong point, but as a standing rule, he knew better than to contradict his daughter.

"I must mention this to the public prosecutor at once, colonel. And besides, we expect a surgeon this evening, who will make an examination of the two bodies, and find out whether the wounds were caused by that particular weapon."

"I gave it to Orso," said the colonel, "and I wish I knew it was at the bottom of the sea. At least—— Plucky boy! I'm heartily glad he had it with him, for I don't quite know how he would have got off if it hadn't been for my Manton."

CHAPTER XIX

IT was rather late when the surgeon put in an appearance. On his road up he had met with an adventure of his own. He had been stopped by Giocanto Castriconi, who, with the most scrupulous politeness, called on him to come and attend a wounded man. He had been conducted to Orso's retreat, and had applied the first dressings to his wound. The bandit had then accompanied the doctor some distance on his way, and had greatly edified him by his talk concerning the most celebrated professors at Pisa, whom he described as his intimate friends.

"Doctor," said the theologian, as they parted, "you have inspired me with such a feeling of respect that I think it hardly necessary to remind you that a physician should be as discreet as a confessor." And as he said the words he clicked the trigger of his gun. "You have quite forgotten the spot at which we have had the honour of meeting. Fare you well! I'm delighted to have made your acquaintance."

Colomba besought the colonel to be present at the post-mortem examination.

"You know my brother's gun better than

anybody," she said, "and your presence will be most valuable. Besides, there are so many wicked people here that we should run a great risk if there were nobody present to protect our interests."

When she was left alone with Miss Lydia, she complained that her head ached terribly, and proposed that they should take a walk just outside the village.

"The fresh air will do me good," she said. "It is so long since I've been out of doors."

As they walked along she talked about her brother, and Miss Lydia, who found the subject tolerably interesting, did not notice that they had travelled a long way from Pietranera. The sun was setting when she became aware of this fact, and she begged Colomba to return. Colomba said she knew a cross-cut which would greatly shorten the walk back, and turning out of the path, she took another, which seemed much less frequented. Soon she began to climb a hill, so steep that to keep her balance she was continually obliged to catch hold of branches with one hand, while she pulled her companion up after her with the other. After about twenty minutes of this trying ascent, they found themselves on a small plateau, clothed with arbutus and myrtle, growing round great granite bould-

ers that jutted above the soil in every direction. Miss Lydia was very tired, there was no sign of the village, and it was almost quite dark.

"Do you know, Colomba, my dear," she said, "I'm afraid we've lost our way!"

"No fear!" answered Colomba. "Let us get on. You follow me."

"But I assure you we're going wrong. The village can't be over there. I'm certain we're turning our backs on it. Why, look at those lights, far away. Pietranera must be in that direction."

"My dear soul," said Colomba, and she looked very much agitated, "you're perfectly right. But in the *mâquis*—less than a hundred yards from here——"

"Well?"

"My brother is lying. If you choose, I might see him, and give him one kiss."

Miss Nevil made a gesture of astonishment.

"I got out of Pietranera without being noticed," continued Colomba, "because I was with you, otherwise I should have been followed. To be so close to him, and not to see him! Why shouldn't you come with me to see my poor brother? You would make him so happy!"

"But, Colomba— That wouldn't be at all proper on my part——"

"I see. With you women who live in towns, your great anxiety is to be proper. We village women only think of what is kind."

"But it's so late! And then what will your brother think of me?"

"He'll think his friends have not forsaken him, and that will give him courage to bear his sufferings."

"And my father? He'll be so anxious!"

"He knows you are with me. Come! Make up your mind. You were looking at his picture this morning," she added, with a sly smile.

"No! Really and truly, I don't dare, Colomba! Think of the bandits who are there."

"Well, what matter? The bandits don't know you. And you were longing to see some."

"Oh, dear!"

"Come, signorina, settle something. I can't leave you alone here. I don't know what might happen to you. Let us go on to see Orso, or else let us go back to the village together. I shall see my brother again. God knows when—never, perhaps!"

"What's that you are saying, Colomba? Well, well, let us go! But only for a minute, and then we'll get home at once."

Colomba squeezed her hand, and without

making any reply walked on so quickly that Miss Lydia could hardly keep up with her. She soon halted, luckily, and said to her companion:

"We won't go any farther without warning them. We might have a bullet flying at our heads."

She began to whistle through her fingers. Soon they heard a dog bark, and the bandits' advanced sentry shortly came in sight. This was our old acquaintance Brusco, who recognised Colomba at once and undertook to be her guide. After many windings through the narrow paths in the *mâquis* they were met by two men, armed to the teeth.

"Is that you, Brandolaccio?" inquired Colomba. "Where is my brother?"

"Just over there," replied the bandit. "But go quietly. He's asleep, and for the first time since his accident. Zounds, it's clear that where the devil gets through, a woman will get through too!"

The two girls moved forward cautiously, and beside a fire, the blaze of which was carefully concealed by a little wall of stones built round it, they beheld Orso, lying on a pile of heather, and covered with a *pilone*. He was very pale, and they could hear his laboured breathing. Colomba sat down near him, and gazed at him

silently, with her hands clasped, as though she were praying in her heart. Miss Lydia hid her face in her handkerchief, and nestled close against her friend, but every now and then she lifted her head to take a look at the wounded man over Colomba's shoulder. Thus a quarter of an hour passed by without a word being said by anybody. At a sign from the theologian, Brandolaccio had plunged with him into the *mâquis,* to the great relief of Miss Lydia, who for the first time fancied the local colour of the bandits' wild beards and warlike equipment was a trifle too strong.

At last Orso stirred. Instantly Colomba bent over him and kissed him again and again, pouring out questions anent his wound, his suffering, and his needs. After having answered that he was doing as well as possible, Orso inquired, in his turn, whether Miss Nevil was still at Pietranera, and whether she had written to him. Colomba, bending over her brother, completely hid her companion from his sight, and indeed the darkness would have made any recognition difficult. She was holding one of Miss Nevil's hands. With the other she slightly raised her wounded brother's head.

"No, brother," she replied. "She did not give me any letter for you. But are you still

thinking about Miss Nevil? You must love her very much!"

"Love her, Colomba!—But—but now she may despise me!"

At this point Miss Nevil made a struggle to withdraw her fingers. But it was no easy matter to get Colomba to slacken her grasp. Small and well-shaped though her hand was, it possessed a strength of which we have already noticed certain proofs.

"Despise you!" cried Colomba. "After what you've done? No, indeed! She praises you! Oh, Orso, I could tell you so many things about her!"

Lydia's hand was still struggling for its freedom, but Colomba kept drawing it closer to Orso.

"But after all," said the wounded man, "why didn't she answer me? If she had sent me a single line, I should have been happy."

By dint of pulling at Miss Nevil's hand, Colomba contrived at last to put it into her brother's. Then, moving suddenly aside, she burst out laughing.

"Orso," she cried, "mind you don't speak evil of Miss Lydia—she understands Corsican quite well."

Miss Lydia took back her hand at once and

stammered some unintelligible words. Orso thought he must be dreaming.

"You here, Miss Nevil? Good heavens! how did you dare? Oh, how happy you have made me!"

And raising himself painfully, he strove to get closer to her.

"I came with your sister," said Miss Lydia, "so that nobody might suspect where she was going. And then I—I wanted to make sure for myself. Alas! how uncomfortable you are here!"

Colomba had seated herself behind Orso. She raised him carefully so that his head might rest on her lap. She put her arms round his neck and signed to Miss Lydia to come near him.

"Closer! closer!" she said. "A sick man mustn't talk too loud." And when Miss Lydia hesitated, she caught her hand and forced her to sit down so close to Orso that her dress touched him, and her hand, still in Colomba's grasp, lay on the wounded man's shoulder.

"Now he's very comfortable!" said Colomba cheerily. "Isn't it good to lie out in the *mâquis* on such a lovely night? Eh, Orso?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! What a heavenly night! I shall never forget it!" said Orso.

"How you must be suffering!" exclaimed Miss Lydia.

"My suffering is all gone now," said Orso, "and I should like to die here!" And his right hand crept up toward Miss Lydia's, which Colomba still held captive.

"You really must be taken to some place where you can be properly cared for, Signor della Rebbia," said Miss Nevil. "I shall never be able to sleep in my bed, now that I have seen you lying here, so uncomfortable, in the open air."

"If I had not been afraid of meeting you, Miss Nevil, I should have tried to get back to Pietranera, and I should have given myself up to the authorities."

"And why were you afraid of meeting her, Orso?" inquired Colomba.

"I had disobeyed you, Miss Nevil, and I should not have dared to look at you just then."

"Do you know you make my brother do everything you choose, Miss Lydia?" said Colomba, laughing. "I won't let you see him any more."

"I hope this unlucky business will soon be cleared up, and that you will have nothing more to fear," said Miss Nevil. "I shall be so happy, when we go away, to know justice has been done

you, and that both your loyalty and your bravery have been acknowledged."

"Going away, Miss Nevil! Don't say that word yet!"

"What are we to do? My father can not spend his whole life shooting. He wants to go."

Orso's hand, which had been touching Miss Lydia's, dropped away, and there was silence for a moment.

"Nonsense!" said Colomba. "We won't let you go yet. We have plenty of things to show you still at Pietranera. Besides, you have promised to paint my picture, and you haven't even begun it so far. And then I've promised to compose you a *serenata,* with seventy-five verses. And then—but what can Brusco be growling about? And here's Brandolaccio running after him. I must go and see what's amiss."

She rose at once, and laying Orso's head, without further ceremony, on Miss Lydia's lap, she ran after the bandits.

Miss Nevil, somewhat startled at finding herself thus left in sole charge of a handsome young Corsican gentleman in the middle of a *mâquis,* was rather puzzled what to do next.

For she was afraid that any sudden movement on her part might hurt the wounded man. But Orso himself resigned the exquisite pillow

on which his sister had just laid his head, and raising himself on his right arm, he said:

"So you will soon be gone, Miss Lydia? I never expected your stay in this unhappy country would have been a long one. And yet since you have come to me here, the thought that I must bid you farewell has grown a hundred times more bitter to me. I am only a poor lieutenant. I had no future—and now I am an outlaw. What a moment in which to tell you that I love you, Miss Lydia! But no doubt this is my only chance of saying it. And I think I feel less wretched now I have unburdened my heart to you."

Miss Lydia turned away her head, as if the darkness were not dark enough to hide her blushes.

"Signor della Rebbia," she said, and her voice shook, "should I have come here at all if——" and as she spoke she laid the Egyptian talisman in Orso's hand. Then, with a mighty effort to recover her usual bantering tone—"It's very wrong of you, Signor Orso, to say such things! You know very well that here, in the middle of the *mâquis,* and with your bandits all about me, I should never dare to be angry with you."

Orso made an attempt to kiss the hand that

held out the talisman. Miss Lydia drew it quickly back; he lost his balance, and fell on his wounded arm. He could not stifle a moan of pain.

"Oh, dear, you've hurt yourself, and it was my fault!" she cried, as she raised him up. "Forgive me!" They talked for some time longer, very low, and very close together.

Colomba, running hastily up, found them in the very same position in which she had left them.

"The soldiers!" she cried. "Orso! try to get up and walk! I'll help you!"

"Leave me!" said Orso. "Tell the bandits to escape. What do I care if I am taken? But take away Miss Lydia. For God's sake, don't let anybody see her here!"

"I won't leave you," said Brandolaccio, who had come up on Colomba's heels.

"The sergeant in charge is the lawyer's godson. He'll shoot you instead of arresting you, and then he'll say he didn't do it on purpose."

Orso tried to rise; he even took a few steps. But he soon halted. "I can't walk," he said. "Fly, all of you! Good-bye, Miss Nevil! Give me your hand! Farewell!"

"We won't leave you!" cried the two girls.

"If you can't walk," said Brandolaccio, "I

must carry you. Come, sir, a little courage! We shall have time to slip away by the ravine. The Signor Padre will keep them busy."

"No, leave me!" said Orso, lying down on the ground. "Colomba, take Miss Nevil away! —for God's sake!"

"You're strong, Signorina Colomba," said Brandolaccio. "Catch hold of his shoulders; I'll take his feet. That's it! Now, then, march!"

In spite of his protests, they began to carry him rapidly along. Miss Lydia was following them, in a terrible fright, when a gun was fired, and five or six other reports instantly responded. Miss Lydia screamed and Brandolaccio swore an oath, but he doubled his pace, and Colomba, imitating him, tore through the thicket without paying the slightest heed to the branches that slashed her face and tore her dress.

"Bend down, bend down, dear!" she called out to her companion. "You may be hit by some stray bullet!"

They had walked, or rather run, some five hundred paces in this fashion when Brandolaccio vowed he could go no farther, and dropped on the ground, regardless of all Colomba's exhortations and reproaches.

"Where is Miss Nevil?" was Orso's one inquiry.

Terrified by the firing, checked at every step by the thick growth of the *mâquis,* Miss Nevil had soon lost sight of the fugitives, and been left all alone in a state of the most cruel alarm.

"She has been left behind," said Brandolaccio, "but she'll not be lost—women always turn up again. Do listen to the row the Padre is making with your gun, Ors' Anton'! Unluckily, it's as black as pitch, and nobody takes much harm from being shot at in the dark."

"Hush!" cried Colomba. "I hear a horse. We're saved!"

Startled by the firing, a horse which had been wandering through the *mâquis,* was really coming close up to them.

"Saved, indeed!" repeated Brandolaccio. It did not take the bandit more than an instant to rush up to the creature, catch hold of his mane, and with Colomba's assistance, bridle him with a bit of knotted rope.

"Now we must warn the Padre," he said. He whistled twice; another distant whistle answered the signal, and the loud voice of the Manton gun was hushed. Then Brandolaccio sprang on the horse's back. Colomba lifted her brother up in front of the bandit, who held him close with one hand and managed his bridle with the other.

In spite of the double load, the animal, urged by a brace of hearty kicks, started off nimbly, and galloped headlong down a steep declivity on which anything but a Corsican steed would have broken its neck a dozen times.

Then Colomba retraced her steps, calling Miss Nevil at the top of her voice; but no answering cry was heard.

After walking hither and thither for some time, trying to recover the path, she stumbled on two riflemen, who shouted, "Who goes there?"

"Well, gentlemen," cried Colomba jeeringly, "here's a pretty racket! How many of you are killed?"

"You were with the bandits!" said one of the soldiers. "You must come with us."

"With pleasure!" she replied. "But there's a friend of mine somewhere close by, and we must find her first."

"Your friend is caught already, and both of you will sleep in jail to-night!"

"In jail, you say? Well, that remains to be seen. But take me to her, meanwhile."

The soldiers led her to the bandits' camp, where they had collected the trophies of their raid—to wit, the cloak which had covered Orso, an old cooking-pot, and a pitcher of cold water. On the same spot she found Miss Nevil, who

had fallen among the soldiers, and, being half dead with terror, did nothing but sob in answer to their questions as to the number of the bandits, and the direction in which they had gone.

Colomba threw herself into her arms and whispered in her ear, "They are safe!" Then, turning to the sergeant, she said: "Sir, you can see this young lady knows none of the things you are trying to find out from her. Give us leave to go back to the village, where we are anxiously expected."

"You'll be taken there, and faster than you like, my beauty," rejoined the sergeant. "And you'll have to explain what you were after at this time of night with the ruffians who have just got away. I don't know what witchcraft those villains practise, but they certainly do bewitch the women—for wherever there are bandits about, you are dead certain to find pretty girls."

"You're very flattering, sergeant!" said Colomba, "but you'd do well to be careful what you say. This young lady is related to the prefect, and you'd better be careful of your language before her."

"A relation of the prefect's," whispered one of the soldiers to his chief. "Why, she does wear a hat!"

"Hats have nothing to do with it," said the

sergeant. "They were both of them with the Padre—the greatest woman-wheedler in the whole country, so it's my business to march them off. And, indeed, there's nothing more for us to do here. But for that d——d Corporal Taupin—the drunken Frenchman showed himself before I'd surrounded the *mâquis*—we should have had them all like fish in a net."

"Are there only seven of you here?" inquired Colomba. "It strikes me, gentlemen, that if the three Poli brothers—Gambini, Sarocchi, and Teodoro—should happen to be at the Cross of Santa Christina, with Brandolaccio and the Padre, they might give you a good deal of corn to grind. If you mean to have a talk with the Commandante della Campagna,* I'd just as soon not be there. In the dark, bullets don't show any respect for persons."

The idea of coming face to face with the dreaded bandits mentioned by Colomba made an evident impression on the soldiers. The sergeant, still cursing Corporal Taupin—"that dog of a Frenchman"—gave the order to retire, and his little party moved toward Pietranera, carrying the *pilone* and the cooking-pot; as for the pitcher, its fate was settled with a kick.

One of the men would have laid hold of Miss

* The title assumed by Teodoro Poli.

Lydia's arm, but Colomba instantly pushed him away.

"Let none of you dare to lay a finger on her!" she said. "Do you fancy we want to run away? Come, Lydia, my dear, lean on me, and don't cry like a baby. We've had an adventure, but it will end all right. In half an hour we shall be at our supper, and for my part I'm dying to get to it."

"What will they think of me!" Miss Nevil whispered.

"They'll think you lost your way in the *mâquis,* that's all."

"What will the prefect say? Above all, what will my father say?"

"The prefect? You can tell him to mind his own business! Your father? I should have thought, from the way you and Orso were talking, that you had something to say to your father."

Miss Nevil squeezed her arm, and answered nothing.

"Doesn't my brother deserve to be loved?" whispered Colomba in her ear. "Don't you love him a little?"

"Oh, Colomba!" answered Miss Nevil, smiling in spite of her blushes, "you've betrayed me! And I trusted you so!"

Colomba slipped her arm round her, and kissed her forehead.

"Little sister," she whispered very low, "will you forgive me?"

"Why, I suppose I must, my masterful sister," answered Lydia, as she kissed her back.

The prefect and the public prosecutor were staying with the deputy-mayor, and the colonel, who was very uneasy about his daughter, was paying them his twentieth call, to ask if they had heard of her, when a rifleman, whom the sergeant had sent on in advance, arrived with the full story of the great fight with the brigands—a fight in which nobody had been either killed or wounded, but which had resulted in the capture of a cooking-pot, a *pilone,* and two girls, whom the man described as the mistresses, or the spies, of the two bandits.

Thus heralded, the two prisoners appeared, surrounded by their armed escort.

My readers will imagine Colomba's radiant face, her companion's confusion, the prefect's surprise, the colonel's astonishment and joy. The public prosecutor permitted himself the mischievous entertainment of obliging poor Lydia to undergo a kind of cross-examination, which did not conclude until he had quite put her out of countenance.

"It seems to me," said the prefect, "that we may release everybody. These young ladies went out for a walk—nothing is more natural in fine weather. They happened to meet a charming young man, who has been lately wounded—nothing could be more natural, again." Then, taking Colomba aside—

"Signorina," he said, "you can send word to your brother that this business promises to turn out better than I had expected. The post-mortem examination and the colonel's deposition both prove that he only defended himself, and that he was alone when the fight took place. Everything will be settled—only he must leave the *mâquis* and give himself up to the authorities."

It was almost eleven o'clock when the colonel, his daughter, and Colomba sat down at last to their supper, which had grown cold. Colomba ate heartily, and made great fun of the prefect, the public prosecutor, and the soldiers. The colonel ate too, but never said a word, and gazed steadily at his daughter, who would not lift her eyes from her plate. At last, gently but seriously, he said in English:

"Lydia, I suppose you are engaged to della Rebbia?"

"Yes, father, to-day," she answered, stead-

ily, though she blushed. Then she raised her eyes, and reading no sign of anger in her father's face, she threw herself into his arms and kissed him, as all well-brought-up young ladies do on such occasions.

"With all my heart!" said the colonel. "He's a fine fellow. But, by G—d, we won't live in this d——d country of his, or I'll refuse my consent."

"I don't know English," said Colomba, who was watching them with an air of the greatest curiosity, "but I'll wager I've guessed what you are saying!"

"We are saying," quoth the colonel, "that we are going to take you for a trip to Ireland."

"Yes, with pleasure; and I'll be the Surella Colomba. Is it settled, colonel? Shall we shake hands on it?"

"In such a case," remarked the colonel, "people exchange kisses!"

CHAPTER XX

ONE afternoon, a few months after the double shot which, as the newspapers said, "plunged the village of Pietranera into a state of consternation," a young man with his left arm in a sling, rode out of Bastia, toward the village of Cardo, celebrated for its spring, which in summer supplies the more fastidious inhabitants of the town with delicious water. He was accompanied by a young lady, tall and remarkably handsome, mounted on a small black horse, the strength and shape of which would have attracted the admiration of a connoisseur, although, by some strange accident, one of its ears had been lacerated. On reaching the village, the girl sprang nimbly to the ground, and, having helped her comrade to dismount, she unfastened the somewhat heavy wallets strapped to his saddle-bow. The horses were left in charge of a peasant. The girl, laden with the wallets, which she had concealed under her *mezzaro,* and the young man, carrying a double-barrelled gun, took their way toward the

mountain, along a very steep path that did not appear to lead to any dwelling. When they had climbed to one of the lower ridges of the Monte Querico, they halted, and sat down on the grass. They were evidently expecting somebody, for they kept perpetually looking toward the mountain, and the young lady often consulted a pretty gold watch—as much, it may be, for the pleasure of admiring what appeared a somewhat newly acquired trinket, as in order to know whether the hour appointed for some meeting or other had come. They had not long to wait. A dog ran out of the *mâquis,* and when the girl called out "Brusco!" it approached at once, and fawned upon them. Presently two bearded men appeared, with guns under their arms, cartridge-belts round their waists, and pistols hanging at their sides. Their torn and patched garments contrasted oddly with their weapons, which were brilliantly polished, and came from a famous Continental factory. In spite of the apparent inequality of their positions, the four actors in this scene greeted one another in terms of old and familiar friendship.

"Well, Ors' Anton'," said the elder bandit to the young man, "so your business is settled—the indictment against you has fallen through? I congratulate you. I'm sorry the lawyer has

left the island. I'd like to see his rage. And how's your arm?"

"They tell me I shall get rid of my sling in a fortnight," said the young man. "Brando, my good frend, I'm going to Italy to-morrow —I wanted to say good-bye to you and to the curé. That's why I asked you to come here."

"You're in a fine hurry," said Brandolaccio. "Only acquitted yesterday, and you're off to-morrow."

"Business must be attended to," said the young lady merrily. "Gentlemen, I've brought some supper. Fall to, if you please, and don't you forget my friend Brusco."

"You spoil Brusco, Mademoiselle Colomba. But he's a grateful dog. You shall see. Here, Brusco," and he held out his gun horizontally, "jump for the Barricini!"

The dog stood motionless, licking his chops, and staring at his master.

"Jump for the della Rebbia!" And he leaped two feet higher than he need have done.

"Look here, my friends," said Orso, "you're plying a bad trade; and even if you don't end your career on that square down below us,* the best you can look for is to die in the *mâquis* by some gendarme's bullet."

* The square at Bastia on which executions take place.

"Well, well," said Castriconi, "that's no more than death, anyhow; and it's better than being killed in your bed by a fever, with your heirs snivelling more or less honestly all round you. To men who are accustomed to the open air like us, there's nothing so good as to die 'in your shoes,' as the village folk say."

"I should like to see you get out of this country," said Orso, "and lead a quieter life. For instance, why shouldn't you settle in Sardinia, as several of your comrades have done? I could make the matter easy for you."

"In Sardinia!" cried Brandolaccio. "*Istos Sardos!* Devil take them and their lingo! We couldn't live in such bad company."

"Sardinia's a country without resources," added the theologian. "For my part, I despise the Sardinians. They keep mounted men to hunt their bandits. That's a stigma on both the bandits and the country.* Out upon Sardinia, say I! The thing that astounds me, Signor della Rebbia, is that you, who are a man of taste and understanding, should not have taken to our life in the *mâquis,* after having once tried it, as you did."

* I owe this criticism of Sardinia to an ex-bandit of my acquaintance, and he alone must bear the responsibility of it. He means that bandits who let themselves be caught by horse soldiers are idiots, and that soldiers who try to catch bandits on horseback have very little chance of getting at them.

"Well," said Orso, with a smile, "when I was lucky enough to be your guest, I wasn't in very good case for enjoying the charms of your position, and my ribs still ache when I think of the ride I took one lovely night, thrown like a bundle across an unsaddled horse that my good friend Brandolaccio guided."

"And the delight of escaping from your pursuers," rejoined Castriconi; "is that nothing to you? How can you fail to realize the charms of absolute freedom in such a beautiful climate as ours? With this to insure respect," and he held up his gun, "we are kings of everything within its range. We can give orders, we can redress wrongs. That's a highly moral entertainment, monsieur, and a very pleasant one, which we don't deny ourselves. What can be more beautiful than a knight-errant's life, when he has good weapons, and more common sense than Don Quixote had? Listen! The other day I was told that little Lilla Luigi's uncle—old miser that he is—wouldn't give her a dowry. So I wrote to him. I didn't use threats—that's not my way. Well, well, in one moment the man was convinced. He married his niece, and I made two people happy. Believe me, Orso, there's no life like the bandit's life! Pshaw! You'd have joined us, perhaps, if it hadn't been for a cer-

tain young Englishwoman whom I have scarcely seen myself, but about whose beauty every one in Bastia is talking."

"My future sister-in-law doesn't like the *mâquis,*" laughed Colomba. "She got too great a fright in one of them."

"Well," said Orso, "you are resolved to stay here? So be it! But tell me whether there is anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing," said Brandolaccio. "You've heaped kindnesses upon us. Here's little Chilina with her dowry ready, so that there'll be no necessity for my friend the curé to write one of his persuasive letters to insure her marrying well. We know the man on your farm will give us bread and powder whenever we need them. So fare you well! I hope we shall see you back in Corsica one of these days."

"In case of pressing need," said Orso, "a few gold coins are very useful. Now we are such old friends, you won't refuse this little *cartouche.** It will help you to provide cartridges of another kind."

"No money between you and me, sir," said Brandolaccio resolutely.

"In the world money is everything," remarked Castriconi, "but in the *mâquis,* all a man

* *Cartouche* means a collection of gold pieces as well as a cartridge.

need care for is a brave heart, and a gun that carries true."

"I don't want to leave you without giving you something to remember me by," persisted Orso. "Come, Brandolaccio, what can I leave with you?"

The bandit scratched his head and cast a sidelong glance at Orso's gun.

"By my faith, if I dared—but no! you're too fond of it."

"What would you like?"

"Nothing! 'Tisn't anything at all. It's knowing how to use it as well. I keep thinking of that devil of a double shot of yours—and with only one hand, too! Oh! that never could happen twice over!"

"Is it the gun you fancy? I brought it for you. But see you don't use it more than you are obliged."

"Oh, I won't promise to make as good use of it as you. But make your mind easy. When any other man has it, you may be certain it's all over with Brando Savelli."

"And you, Castriconi—what am I to give you?"

"Since you really insist on giving me some tangible keepsake, I'll simply ask you to send me the smallest Horace you can get. It will amuse

me, and prevent me from forgetting all my Latin. There's a little woman who sells cigars on the jetty at Bastia. If you give it to her, she'll see I get it."

"You shall have an Elzevir, my erudite friend. There just happens to be one among some books I was going to take away with me. Well, good friends, we must part! Give me your hands. If you should ever think of Sardinia write to me. Signor N., the notary, will give you my address on the mainland."

"To-morrow, lieutenant," said Brando, "when you get out in the harbour, look up to this spot on the mountain-side. We shall be here, and we'll wave our handkerchiefs to you."

And so they parted. Orso and his sister took their way back to Cardo, and the bandits departed up the mountain.

CHAPTER XXI

ONE lovely April morning, Sir Thomas Nevil, his daughter—a newly made bride—Orso, and Colomba, drove out of Pisa to see a lately discovered Etruscan vault to which all strangers who came to that part of the country paid a visit.

Orso and his wife went down into the ancient building, pulled out their pencils, and began to sketch the mural paintings. But the colonel and Colomba, who neither of them cared much for archæology, left them to themselves, and walked about in the neighbourhood.

"My dear Colomba," said the colonel, "we shall never get back to Pisa in time for lunch. Aren't you hungry? There are Orso and his wife buried in their antiquities; when once they begin sketching together, it lasts forever!"

"Yes," remarked Colomba. "And yet they never bring the smallest sketch home with them."

"I think," proceeded the colonel, "our best plan would be to make our way to that little farm-house yonder. We should find bread there,

and perhaps some *aleatico*. Who knows, we might even find strawberries and cream! And then we should be able to wait patiently for our artists."

"You are quite right, colonel. You and I are the reasonable members of this family. We should be very foolish if we let ourselves be martyrized by that pair of lovers, who live on poetry! Give me your arm! Don't you think I'm improving? I lean on people's arms, wear fashionable hats and gowns and trinkets—I'm learning I don't know how many fine things—I'm not at all a young savage any more. Just observe the grace with which I wear this shawl. That fair-haired spark—that officer belonging to your regiment who came to the wedding—oh, dear! I can't recollect his name!—a tall, curly-headed man, whom I could knock over with one hand——"

"Chatsworth?" suggested the colonel.

"That's it!—but I never shall be able to say it!—Well, you know he's over head and ears in love with me!"

"O Colomba, you're growing a terrible flirt! We shall have another wedding before long."

"I! Marry! And then who will there be to bring up my nephew—when Orso provides me

with a nephew? And who'll teach him to talk Corsican? Yes, he shall talk Corsican, and I'll make him a peaked cap, just to vex you."

"Well, well, wait till you have your nephew, and then you shall teach him to use a dagger, if you choose."

"Farewell to daggers!" said Colomba merrily. "I have a fan now, to rap your fingers with when you speak ill of my country."

Chatting thus, they reached the farm-house, where they found wine, strawberries, and cream. Colomba helped the farmer's wife to gather the strawberries, while the colonel drank his *aleatico*. At the turning of a path she caught sight of an old man, sitting in the sun, on a straw chair. He seemed ill, his cheeks were fallen in, his eyes were hollow, he was frightfully thin; as he sat there, motionless, pallid, staring fixedly in front of him, he looked more like a corpse than like a living creature. Colomba watched him for some minutes, and with a curiosity so great that it attracted the woman's attention.

"That poor old fellow is a countryman of yours," she said. "For I know you are from Corsica by the way you talk, signorina! He has had great trouble in his own country. His children met with some terrible death. They say—you'll excuse me, signorina—that when they

quarrel, your compatriots don't show each other very much mercy. Then the poor old gentleman, being left all alone, came over to Pisa, to a distant relation of his, who owns this farm. Between his misfortunes and his sorrow, the good man is a little cracked. . . . The lady found him troublesome—for she sees a great deal of company. So she sent him out here. He's very gentle—no worry at all. He doesn't speak three words the whole day long. In fact, his brain's quite gone. The doctor comes to see him every week. He says he won't live long."

"There's no hope for him, then!" said Colomba. "In such a case, death will be a mercy."

"You might say a word to him in Corsican, signorina. Perhaps it would cheer him up to hear the speech of his own country."

"I'll see!" said Colomba, and her smile was mysterious.

She drew nearer to the old man, till her shadow fell across his chair. Then the poor idiot lifted his head and stared at Colomba, while she looked at him, smiling still. After a moment, the old man passed his hand across his forehead, and closed his eyes, as though he would have shut out the sight of Colomba. He opened them again, desperately wide this time. His lips be-

gan to work, he tried to stretch out his hands, but, fascinated by Colomba's glance, he sat, nailed, as it were, to his chair, unable to move or utter a word. At last great tears dropped from his eyes, and a few sobs escaped from his heaving chest.

"'Tis the first time I've seen him like this," said the good woman. "This signorina belongs to your own country; she has come to see you," said she to the old man.

"Mercy!" he cried in a hoarse voice. "Mercy! Are you not content? The leaf I burned. How did you read it? But why did you take them both? Orlanduccio! You can't have read anything against him! You should have left me one, only one! Orlanduccio—you didn't read *his* name!"

"I had to have them both!" answered Colomba, speaking low and in the Corsican dialect. "The branches are lopped off! If the stem had not been rotten, I would have torn it up! Come! make no moan. You will not suffer long! *I* suffered for two years!"

The old man cried out, and then his head dropped on his breast. Colomba turned her back on him, and went slowly into the house, humming some meaningless lines out of a *ballata:*

"I must have the hand
that fired, the eye that aimed, the heart
that planned."

While the farmer's wife ran to attend on the old man, Colomba, with blazing eyes and brilliant cheeks, sat down to luncheon opposite the colonel.

"What's the matter with you?" he said. "You look just as you did that day at Pietranera, when they fired at us while we were at dinner."

"Old Corsican memories had come back to me. But all that's done with. I shall be godmother, sha'n't I? Oh! what fine names I'll give him! Ghilfuccio—Tomaso—Orso—Leone!"

The farmer's wife came back into the room.

"Well?" inquired Colomba, with the most perfect composure. "Is he dead, or had he only fainted?"

"It was nothing, signorina. But it's curious what an effect the sight of you had on him."

"And the doctor says he won't last long?"

"Not two months, very likely."

"He'll be no great loss!" remarked Colomba.

"What the devil are you talking about?" inquired the colonel.

"About an idiot from my own country, who is boarded out here. I'll send from time to time to find out how he is. Why, Colonel Nevil, aren't you going to leave any strawberries for Lydia and my brother?"

When Colomba left the farm-house and got into the carriage, the farmer's wife looked after her for a while. Then, turning to her daughter:

"Dost see that pretty young lady yonder?" she said. "Well, I'm certain she has the evil eye!"

THE END

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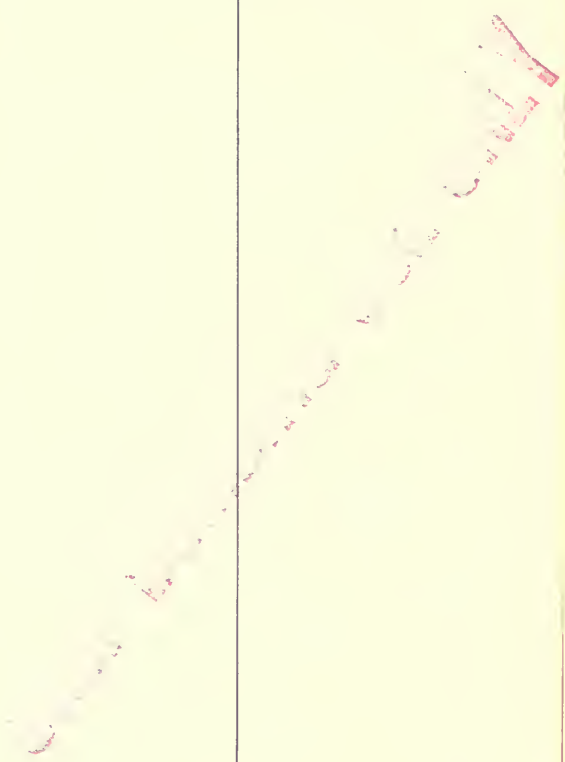

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